

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

GENESISシリーズ

境界線上の ホライズン

V^上

GENESISシリーズ
きりぎりすのぼる
境界線上のホライゾン V(上)

——状況は静から動へ。
関東、近隣の諸国が武蔵とP.A.Odaを
天秤に掛け、遂に戦端が開かれた……！
奥州三国の支持を得て、柴田勢を退け
た武蔵。生徒会副会長の正統は、信長死
後の歴史再現の鍵を握る北条に働き掛け、
羽柴にプレッシャーを与えようと画策す
るが、その矢先、羽柴勢が毛利領内に侵
攻したとの一報が届く！
毛利領を活める六蔵式仏蘭西の迎撃は。
そして連動して動き出す関東勢力の群雄
に、武蔵もその一員として相対する。
各国に分割統治された中世の神州・日
本を舞台に繰り広げる、壮大な学園戦国
ファンタジー第五話、いよいよ開幕！



か-5-40



GENESISシリーズ
境界線上のホライゾン V(上)

川上 稔

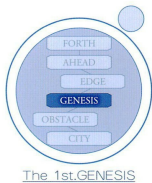
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かわかみ しのぶ
川上 稔

1975年1月3日生まれ。東京出身。原作の執筆とゲームのシナリオ。アニメは口頭即時興行小説の執筆。アニメⅡ期や設定資料集の監修とまさに八面六臂の活躍中。連続休日なし記録はいつかどこまで伸びるのか？

【電撃文庫作品】
都市シリーズ
パンクアーボリス1835
エアリアルシティ
風本街都 香港(上)(下)
森楽都市OSAKA(上)(下)
閉鎖都市 巴里(上)(下)
機甲都市 柏林1～5
電詞都市DTT(上)(下)
AHEADシリーズ
終わりのクロニクル①～⑦
GENESISシリーズ
境界線上のホライゾンⅠ～Ⅳ
境界線上のホライゾンV(上)
【電撃の単行本】
連射王(上)(下)

イラスト:さとやす(TENKY)

山形生まれの栃木育ち「最近「うエティ」とんだらうりかけによって新たな食生活がみえました」※●趣味って、寝だから太平洋風味じゃないですかアリス。

カ/（一）300画

horizon
on the Middle
of Nowhere
episode.05



Installation

installation



installation

■ Houjou Ujinao ■

As the final leader of Houjou, he has a bit of a fleeting image, but he actually fought pretty hard.

After all, his dad's wife was Takeda Shingen's daughter, making him Shingen's grandson.

After the Takeda clan fell, he claimed that gave him a right to their land and so he joined in the fight over its ownership.

But at that time, his dad had all the real power in Houjou as the head of the clan and Ujinao acted more as the symbol of Houjou.

That situation remained when Nobunaga was assassinated at Honnouji, so Ujinao was sent to the front line on his dad's orders and clashed with Matsudaira after being left in charge of Kantou as part of the Oda alliance. But just when it looked like he was losing motivation, he grew up pretty nicely, took on the Matsudaira forces that were all excited after taking in the Takeda army, and went a little nuts with an 80-day battle that ended in a draw...

With his uncle and dad, the Houjou family seemed pretty hot-blooded, but even among them, I think Ujinao had his own strengths while fighting on the front line.

Now, when they were making peace after that battle, Ujinao received Ieyasu's daughter as his wife, so I think Ieyasu must have seen something in Ujinao.

Later, at the Siege of Odawara, his dad and uncle were ordered to commit seppuku, but because Ujinao's wife was Ieyasu's daughter, he was only placed under house arrest and later released. He returned as a daimyo under Hideyoshi, but died of illness a few months later.

He was only 30 years old.

With Horizon's Ujinao, I replaced the family antagonism with a gathering of various nations and replaced the sickly body with an automaton body. Her demonic design means she has demon horns, but because I decided to have her use large and small swords as weapons, I made them asymmetric. Her clothes are primarily white. Her skin is dark to give her more of an Indian look. The giant hard point parts on her shoulders and hips are to attach the large swords, so I view her true design to be the one with the swords attached. She can be a little harsh with the Sanada forces because, when historical Houjou clashed with Matsudaira, Sanada betrayed them right away.

(Kawakami Minoru)

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(Kawakami Minoru)

**Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon - Horizon on the
Middle of Nowhere - 5A**



—What is the right way to live and to die?

V
上

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

—What is the right way to live and to die?

Characters



2 character

Name: Mouri Terumoto

Faction: Ecole de Paris

Position: Student Council President

Style: Strike Forcer

Special: Delinquent

Name: Louis Exiv

Faction: Ecole de Paris

Position: Chancellor

Style: Holy Master

Special: Roi-Soleil

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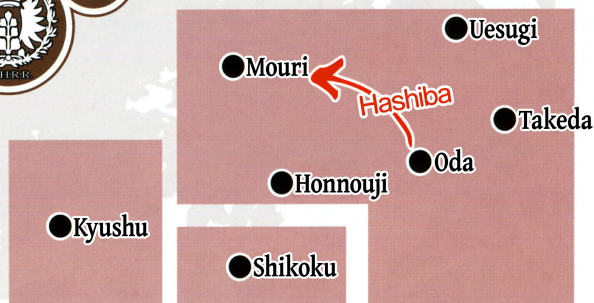
Special: Delinquent

World



4

world



The two clans settled things after Nobunaga's assassination. At the time, Mouri Terumoto and others confronted Hashiba who had besieged Mouri's Bitchu Takamatsu Castle and flooded it. But neither side could back down and Mouri sensed things turning against them. Hashiba was prepared to win through a war of attrition, but when word arrived of Nobunaga's assassination, Hashiba negotiated terms of peace while hiding that fact from Mouri.

Important!

With that, Mouri's fighting with Hashiba came to an end and Hashiba made a Great Return to their headquarters to strike back after Nobunaga's assassination.

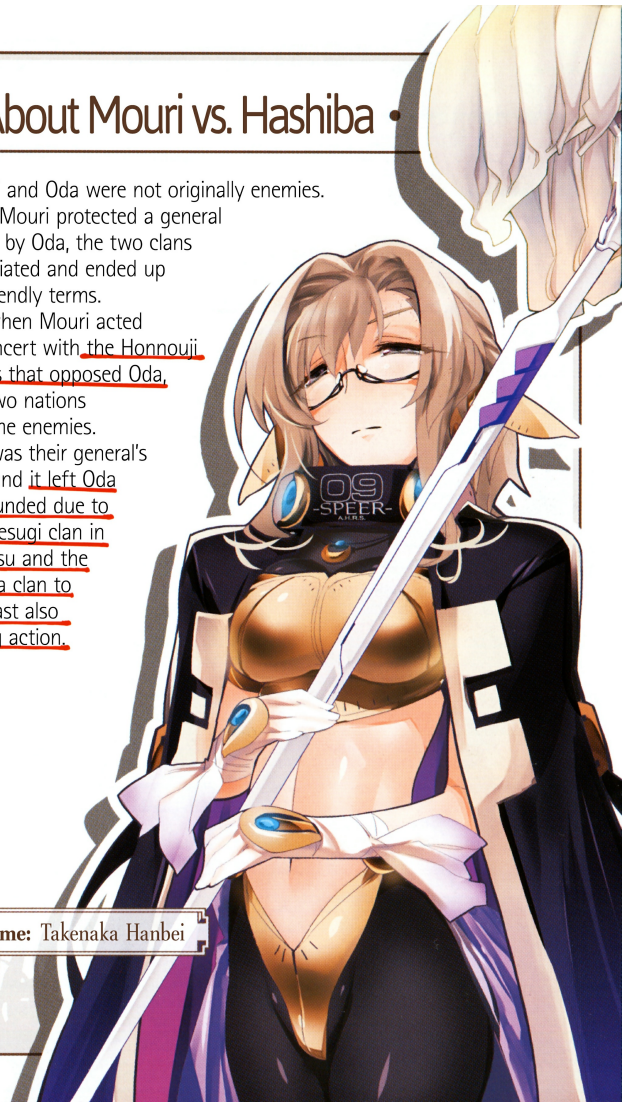


Name: Djinn

• About Mouri vs. Hashiba •

Mouri and Oda were not originally enemies. After Mouri protected a general exiled by Oda, the two clans negotiated and ended up on friendly terms. But when Mouri acted in concert with the Honnouji forces that opposed Oda, the two nations became enemies. This was their general's idea and it left Oda surrounded due to the Uesugi clan in Jouetsu and the Takeda clan to the east also taking action.

Name: Takenaka Hanbei



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Name: Takenaka Hanbei

Map:

Top right: Uesugi

Top left: Mouri

Far right: Takeda

Center: Oda

Middle left: Honnouji

Bottom right: Shikoku

Bottom left: Kyushu

Arrow from Oda to Mouri: Hashiba

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Ookubo

Musashi Divine Transmission **EXTRA EDITION**

Musashi Ariadust Academy Girls Summer Uniform



With the cooperation of the Asama Shrine.



"Well? What's with that coquettish pose? You need to show some more manly spirit by spreading those legs wide and saying, 'Check out the slit here!'"



"A girl! I'm a girl! And this clearly has nothing to do with the Asama Shrine, but they still stuck 'with the cooperation of the Asama Shrine' down there!"



"Since Bell-rin was the one to sew it up, it should really say 'with the cooperation of Suzu's Bath' if anything. Is it one of those school uniform in the bath scenarios?"



"Eh? G-girls wear their...school uniforms...in the bath?"



"You don't have to know about that. So don't worry about it, okay?"

Musashi Divine Transmission: Musashi Divine Transmission – Extra Edition
Musashi Ariadust Academy Girls Summer Uniform Right box: Summer Uniform
Top Left box: Summer Uniform Skirt Bottom corner: With the cooperation of
the Asama Shrine.

Naruze: “Well? What’s with that coquettish pose? You need to show some more manly spirit by spreading those legs wide and saying, ‘Check out the slit here’!”

Asama: “A girl! I’m a girl! And this clearly has nothing to do with the Asama Shrine, but they still stuck ‘with the cooperation of the Asama Shrine’ down there!”

Naito: “Since Bell-rin was the one to sew it up, it should really say ‘with the cooperation of Suzu’s Bath’ if anything. Is it one of those school uniform in the bath scenarios?”

Suzu: “Eh? G-girls wear their...school uniforms...in the bath?”

Asama: “You don’t have to know about that. So don’t worry about it, okay?”

Far Eastern History

極東史

Far Eastern History

AIR L.A.D.U.S.T

First of all

Hopefully, this will be of some help
In getting a sense for how humankind stubbornly worked hard
As they did things and had things done to them



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Chapter 17: Three Different People on the Multi Screen ... P471	
Chapter 18: Heat Source Student in the Line of Sight ... P507	Illustrations: Satoyasu (TENKY)
Chapter 19: Wall Builder in a Clogged Place ... P523	Cover Design: Watanabe Kouichi (2725 Inc)
Chapter 20: Converter on the Stagnant Stage ... P541	Book Design Concept: TENKY

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 Ohiroshiki Ginji Gourmet otaku with a Heart-sama style build.	 Kiyonari Urquiaga 2nd special duty officer. Flying half-dragon. Hopes to be an inquisitor. Known as Uqui.
 Shirojiro Bertoni Treasurer. Young leading member of Musashi's commerce and industry guild.	 Tenzou Crossunite 1st special duty officer. Ninja and errand-runner who always covers his face with his hat.
 Toussaint Neshinbara Secretary. Loves history, wants to be an author, and writes doujins.	 Naomasa 6th special duty officer. Older sister type who works in the engine division. Smokes and laughs loudly.
 Nate Mitotsudaira 5th special duty officer. Member of a knight family and inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name. Half werewolf.	 Nenji Slime with about 3 HP. Manly.
 Noriki Laborer boy who supports his family. Clumsy marital artist. Silent and unsociable.	 Heidi Augesvarer Treasurer's aide. Shirojiro's partner. Has a white fox named Erimaki.
 Hassan Furubushi Calpis logo style Indian. Lives while eating and drinking only curry.	 Persona-kun Super macho man with a bucket helmet. Silent, strong, and kindhearted.
 Horizon Ariadust Toori's childhood friend and current ruler of Mikawa. Currently an automaton. Her emotions were taken as parts for the Logismo Oplo.	 Honda Futayo Former Mikawa student. Honda Tadakatsu's daughter. Uses a strongly old-fashioned speech pattern.
 Honda Masazumi Vice president of the student council. Diligent exchange student who arrived from Mikawa the previous year. Has various issues with her family.	 Malga Naruze 4th special duty officer. Black-haired six-winged Weiss Hexen. Member of the manga club.
 Margot Naito 3rd special duty officer. Blonde-haired six-winged Schwarz Hexen. Always smiling.	Miriam Poqou Girl who stays in her room because she lives in a wheelchair.
 Mukai Suzu Blind but always gives it her all. Acts as everyone's stopper.	 Tachibana Muneshige Former Tres España 1st special duty officer. Amore. Currently working to regain his inherited name.
 Tachibana Gin Former Tres España 3rd special duty officer. Muneshige's wife and possessor of cannon-style false arms. Fifty times.	 Mary Stuart Half-sister of English Queen Elizabeth. Well-endowed blonde. Living with Tenzou as his future wife. Owner of Ex. Collbrande.
Mishina Hiro Granddaughter of the engine division's chief. Loves mechanical things. Naomasa's underclassman. Her name is pronounced Hiro, not Dai.	Mishina Shouichi Mishina Hiro's father. Taizou's son-in-law. Head of Kantou IZUMO.
 Satomi Yoshiyasu Satomi Academy's student council president. Small but does not cry. Uses the god of war Righteousness.	 Ookubo Tadachika/Nagayasu A rare Far Easterner with a double inherited name. A second year and head of the representative committee. Speaks in a fake-sounding Kansai dialect.

character

Academy Officials



Kanou

Ookubo's maid. An automaton. Head of the public morals committee. A second year.



Date Shigezane (Narumi)

Masamune's cousin. Vice chancellor of the Date clan and uses a mobile shell named Unturning Centipede. Confident elder sister type.



Oriotorai Makiko

High-speed battling teacher. Always wears a track suit.



Sakai Tadatsugu

Musashi Ariadust Academy's president. Used to be a very able person but was demoted.



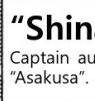
"Musashi"

Automaton that supervises the Musashi and overall commander. Her sharp comments are hard to put up with.



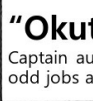
"Asakusa"

Captain automaton of Musashi's first port ship. Short hair.



"Shinagawa"

Captain automaton of Musashi's first starboard ship. Same model as "Asakusa".



"Okutama"

Captain automaton of Musashi's rear central ship. Also takes care of odd jobs at Sakai's home.



"Musashino"

Captain automaton of Musashi's front central ship. Leader on the bridge. Close to Suzu and Adele.



Yoshinao

King of Musashi who was sent from Hexagone Française. Has a veto right toward the academy and has the authority to manage Musashi.



Sanyou Mitsuki

Class 3-Bamboo's homeroom teacher. Looks up to Oriotorai. Somewhat sensitive and unlucky.

M.H.R.R.



Hashiba Toukichirou

M.H.R.R. Vice President and monkey-masked automaton girl. The nervous bomber type.



Olimpia

Innocentius's older and younger stepsister. Current Pope-Chancellor.



Matthias

Representative of M.H.R.R.'s Catholics. Student Council President. Younger brother of Chancellor and Emperor Rudolf II. Being a puppet is fun!



Maeda Toshiie

Catholic representative. Treasurer. Samurai attendant that has become a ghost and is peacefully spending his days with his wife Matsu.



Fukushima Masanori

Under Hashiba's direct command. Ten Spears #1. Speaks in an old-fashioned way.



Katou Kiyomasa

Under Hashiba's direct command. Ten Spears #2. The busty blonde type and speaks politely.



Takenaka Hanbei

Ten Spears #9. Hashiba's tactician. Carefree long-lived girl. Dies before the invasion of Mouri according to the Testament, but has also inherited the name of Kuroda Kanbei.



Katagiri Katsumoto

Ten Spears #10. Diligent boy who fills the negotiator role among others. Used as a plaything a lot, but he won't let it get to him and will do his best like a man!

P.A. Oda



Sassa Narimasa

One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Delinquent and assault type. But methodical.



Shibata Katsuie

One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Athletic type. Very troublesome after his recent marriage.



Fuwa Mitsuharu

P.A. Oda's local anti-Sviet Rus treasurer. Her, Toshiie, and Narimasa are known as the Triumvirate.



Oichi

Shibata Katsuie's wife. Gentle berserker.



Mori Nagayoshi

Manliest young fellow in P.A. Oda. His head spins at the instant of impact.



Takigawa Ichimasu

P.A. Oda ninja commander who excels at castle building and ship operation.

character

● Date Clan



Date Masamune

Head of the Date clan. Inherits the power of the Dragon God. Chancellor and student council president of the Date clan.

Yoshihime

Masamune's mother. Half demonic long-lived and half human. Principal of Sendai Date Academy.

Katakura Kojuurou

Vice president of the Date clan. Full of intense highs and lows.

● Sviet Rus



Marfa Boretskaya

Female mayor of the floating city Novgorod. An undead demon.



Honjou Shigenaga

Brave general who defends Sviet Rus's lands. Uses the Honjou Shield.

Uesugi Kagekatsu

Head of the Uesugi clan and demon king who has inherited the name of Sviet Rus's king Ivan the Terrible. Uses a metal staff and lightning attacks.

Saitou Tomonobu

Elderly Sviet Rus 1st Special Duty Officer. A "Zhong Kui" who can predict the flow of battle and his enemy's movements based on his experience.

● Mogami Clan ● Hexagone Française



Mogami Yoshiaki

Betrayal-loving daimyo known as the Fox of Ushuu. Shrewd leader who unified frigid Mogami in a single generation.

Shakenobe

The Mouse that follows Yoshiaki-sama, mon!



Louis Exiv

Hexagone Française's chancellor. Refreshing young man known as the Roi-Soleil. Has divine blood.



Mouri Terumoto

Hexagone Française's student council president. Delinquent type. Destined to be Musashi's enemy as leader of the Western Army.



Henri of the Three Musketeers

Female combat-style automaton. Acts as the leader and as Terumoto's bodyguard. Uses large remote-controlled swords.



Armand of the Three Musketeers

Male combat-style automaton. Uses broad-range gravitational control.



Reine des Garous

Turenne. Hexagone Française's vice chancellor. Mitotsudaira's mom. All-around giant breasts.

● Houjou



Houjou Ujinao

Chancellor and student council vice president of the Houjou Association of Indian States. A demonic long-lived, but has an automaton body.

Kotarou

Ninja girl Mouse that accompanies Ujinao. Skilled but gets treated like a child.

● Sanada



Unno Rokurou

Sanada Academy Ten Braves #7. Eccentric dancer. Uses a dancing style of swordplay.



Kakei Juuzou

Sanada Academy Ten Braves #10. Tall skinny man who uses a remote-controlled shooting technique.

Mochizuki Yukitada

Ten Braves #9. Automaton who uses explosion spells.

character

● Musashi

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- Noriki: Laborer boy who supports his family. Clumsy martial artist. Silent and unsociable.
- Heidi Augesvarer: Treasurer's aide. Shirojiro's partner. Has a white fox named Erimaki.
- Hassan Furubushi: Calpis logo style Indian. Lives while eating and drinking only curry.
- Persona-kun: Super macho man with a bucket helmet. Silent, strong, and kindhearted.
- Horizon Ariadust: Toori's childhood friend and current ruler of Mikawa.

Currently an automaton. Her emotions were taken as parts for the Logismoi Oplo.

- Honda Futayo: Former Mikawa student. Honda Tadakatsu's daughter. Uses a strongly old-fashioned speech pattern.
- Honda Masazumi: Vice president of the student council. Diligent exchange student who arrived from Mikawa the previous year. Has various issues with her family.
- Malga Naruze: 4th special duty officer. Black-haired six-winged Weiss Hexen. Member of the manga club.
- Margot Naito: 3rd special duty officer. Blonde-haired six-winged Schwarz Hexen. Always smiling.
- Miriam Poqou: Girl who stays in her room because she lives in a wheelchair.
- Mukai Suzu: Blind but always gives it her all. Acts as everyone's stopper.
- Tachibana Muneshige: Former Tres España 1st special duty officer. Amore. Currently working to regain his inherited name.
- Tachibana Gin: Former Tres España 3rd special duty officer. Muneshige's wife and possessor of cannon-style false arms. Fifty times.
- Mary Stuart: Half-sister of English Queen Elizabeth. Well-endowed blonde. Living with Tenzou as his future wife. Owner of Ex. Collbrande.
- Mishina Hiro: Granddaughter of the engine division's chief. Loves mechanical things. Naomasa's underclassman. Her name is pronounced Hiro, not Dai.
- Mishina Shouichi: Mishina Hiro's father. Taizou's son-in-law. Head of Kantou IZUMO.
- Satomi Yoshiyasu: Satomi Academy's student council president. Small but does not cry. Uses the god of war Righteousness.
- Ookubo Tadachika/Nagayasu: A rare Far Easterner with a double inherited name. A second year and head of the representative committee. Speaks in a fake-sounding Kansai dialect.
- Kanou: Ookubo's maid. An automaton. Head of the public morals committee. A second year.
- Date Shigesana [Narumi]: Masamune's cousin. Vice chancellor of the Date clan and uses a mobile shell named Unturning Centipede. Confident

elder sister type.

● Academy Officials

- Oriotorai Makiko: High-speed battling teacher. Always wears a track suit.
- Sakai Tadatsugu: Musashi Ariadust Academy's president. Used to be a very able person but was demoted.
- "Musashi": Automaton that supervises the Musashi and overall commander. Her sharp comments are hard to put up with.
- "Asakusa": Captain automaton of Musashi's first port ship. Short hair.
- "Shinagawa": Captain automaton of Musashi's first starboard ship. Same model as "Asakusa".
- "Okutama": Captain automaton of Musashi's rear central ship. Also takes care of odd jobs at Sakai's home.
- "Musashino": Captain automaton of Musashi's front central ship. Leader on the bridge. Close to Suzu and Adele.
- Yoshinao: King of Musashi who was sent from Hexagone Française. Has a veto right toward the academy and has the authority to manage Musashi.
- Sanyou Mitsuki: Class 3-Bamboo's homeroom teacher. Looks up to Oriotorai. Somewhat sensitive and unlucky.

● M.H.R.R.

- Hashiba Toukichirou: M.H.R.R. Vice President and monkey-masked automaton girl. The nervous bomber type.
- Olimpia: Innocentius's older and younger stepsister. Current Pope-Chancellor.
- Matthias: Representative of M.H.R.R.'s Catholics. Student Council President. Younger brother of Chancellor and Emperor Rudolf II. Being a puppet is fun!
- Maeda Toshiie: Catholic representative. Treasurer. Samurai attendant that has become a ghost and is peacefully spending his days with his wife Matsu.
- Fukushima Masanori: Under Hashiba's direct command. Ten Spears #1. Speaks in an old-fashioned way.
- Katou Kiyomasa: Under Hashiba's direct command. Ten Spears #2. The

bustly blonde type and speaks politely.

- Takenaka Hanbei: Ten Spears #9. Hashiba's tactician. Carefree long-lived girl. Dies before the invasion of Mouri according to the Testament, but has also inherited the name of Kuroda Kanbei.
- Katagiri Katsumoto: Ten Spears #10. Diligent boy who fills the negotiator role among others. Used as a plaything a lot, but he won't let it get to him and will do his best like a man!

● P.A. Oda

- Sassa Narimasa: One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Delinquent and assault type. But methodical.
- Shibata Katsuie: One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Athletic type. Very troublesome after his recent marriage.
- Fuwa Mitsuharu: P.A. Oda's local anti-Sviet Rus treasurer. Her, Toshiie, and Narimasa are known as the Triumvirate.
- Oichi: Shibata Katsuie's wife. Gentle berserker.
- Mori Nagayoshi: Manliest young fellow in P.A. Oda. His head spins at the instant of impact.
- Takigawa Ichimasu: P.A. Oda ninja commander who excels at castle building and ship operation.

● Date Clan

- Date Masamune: Head of the Date clan. Inherits the power of the Dragon God. Chancellor and student council president of the Date clan.
- Katakura Kojuurou: Vice president of the Date clan. Full of intense highs and lows.
- Yoshihime: Masamune's mother. Half demonic long-lived and half human. Principal of Sendai Date Academy.

● Sviet Rus

- Marfa Boretskaya: Female mayor of the floating city Novgorod. An

undead demon.

- Honjou Shigenaga: Brave general who defends Sviet Rus's lands. Uses the Honjou Shield.
- Uesugi Kagekatsu: Head of the Uesugi clan and demon king who has inherited the name of Sviet Rus's king Ivan the Terrible. Uses a metal staff and lightning attacks.
- Saitou Tomonobu: Elderly Sviet Rus 1st Special Duty Officer. A "Zhong Kui" who can predict the flow of battle and his enemy's movements based on his experience.

● Mogami Clan

- Mogami Yoshiaki: Betrayal-loving daimyo known as the Fox of Ushuu. Shrewd leader who unified frigid Mogami in a single generation.
- Shakenobe: The Mouse that follows Yoshiaki-sama, mon!

● Hexagone Française

- Louis Exiv: Hexagone Française's chancellor. Refreshing young man known as the Roi-Soleil. Has divine blood.
- Mouri Terumoto: Hexagone Française's student council president. Delinquent type. Destined to be Musashi's enemy as leader of the Western Army.
- Henri of the Three Musketeers: Female combat-style automaton. Acts as the leader and as Terumoto's bodyguard. Uses large remote-controlled swords.
- Armand of the Three Musketeers: Male combat-style automaton. Uses broad-range gravitational control.
- Reine de Garou: Turenne. Hexagone Française's vice chancellor. Mitotsudaira's mom. All-around giant breasts.

● Houjou

- Houjou Ujinao: Chancellor and student council vice president of the Houjou Association of Indian States. A demonic long-lived, but has an automaton body.

- Kotarou: Ninja girl Mouse that accompanies Ujinao. Skilled but gets treated like a child.

- **Sanada**

- Unno Rokurou: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #7. Eccentric dancer. Uses a dancing style of swordplay.
- Kakei Juuzou: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #10. Tall skinny man who uses a remote-controlled shooting technique.
- Mochizuki Yukitada: Ten Braves #9. Automaton who uses explosion spells.

Glossary

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• Asama:	Asama Tomo
• Obscene:	Itou Kenji (Itoken)
• Me:	Aoi Toori
• Gold Mar:	Margot Naito
• Righteousness:	Satomi Yoshiyasu
• Scarred:	Mary Stuart
• Silver Wolf:	Nate Mitosudaira
• Still Got It:	Reine des Garous
• Wise Sister:	Aoi Kimi
• 481:	Mishina Shouichi
• Tachibana Husband:	Tachibana Muneshige
• Tachibana Wife:	Tachibana Gin
• Smoking Girl:	Naomasa
• 10ZO:	Tenzou Crossunit
• Tonbokiri:	Honda Futayo
• Sticky King:	Nenji
• 83:	Hassan Furubushi
• Flat Vassal:	Adele Balfette
• Vice President:	Honda Masazumi
• Bell:	Mukai Suzu
• Hori-ko:	Horizon Ariadust
• Mal-Ga:	Malga Naruze
• Marube-ya:	Heidi Augesvarer
• 847:	Mishina Hiro
• Novice:	Toussaint Neshinbara
• Musashi King:	Yoshinao
• Four Eyes:	Shakespeare
• Worshipper:	Ohiroshiki Ginji
• Laborer:	Noriki
• Unturning:	Date Narumi
• Kagetsuna-kun:	Katakura Kojuurou
• Fang:	Oniniwa Tsunamoto
• Caretaker:	Rusu Makikage
• Taki:	Takigawa Ichimasu
• Great Upperclassmen:	Shibata Katsue
• O12:	Oichi
• Lily Flower:	Sassa Narimasa
• Omaeda:	Maeda Toshiie
• Fuwaa:	Fuwa Mitsuharu
• Mory:	Mori Nagayoshi
• Nine Tail Girl:	Mogami Yosahiaki
• Shigeko:	Honjou Shigenaga
• KageV:	Uesugi Kagekatsu
• Tomo-no-Bu:	Saitou Tomonobu
• Nagaya-Stable:	Ookubo Tadachika
• CAN:	Kanou
• Llaf:	Fukushima Masanori
• Kiyo-Massive:	Katou Kiyomasa
• □□凸:	Katagiri Katsumoto
• Kuro-Take:	Takenaka Hanbei

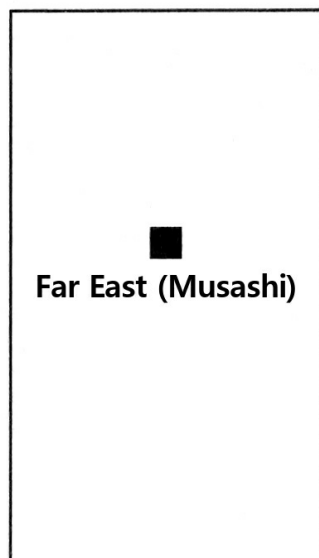
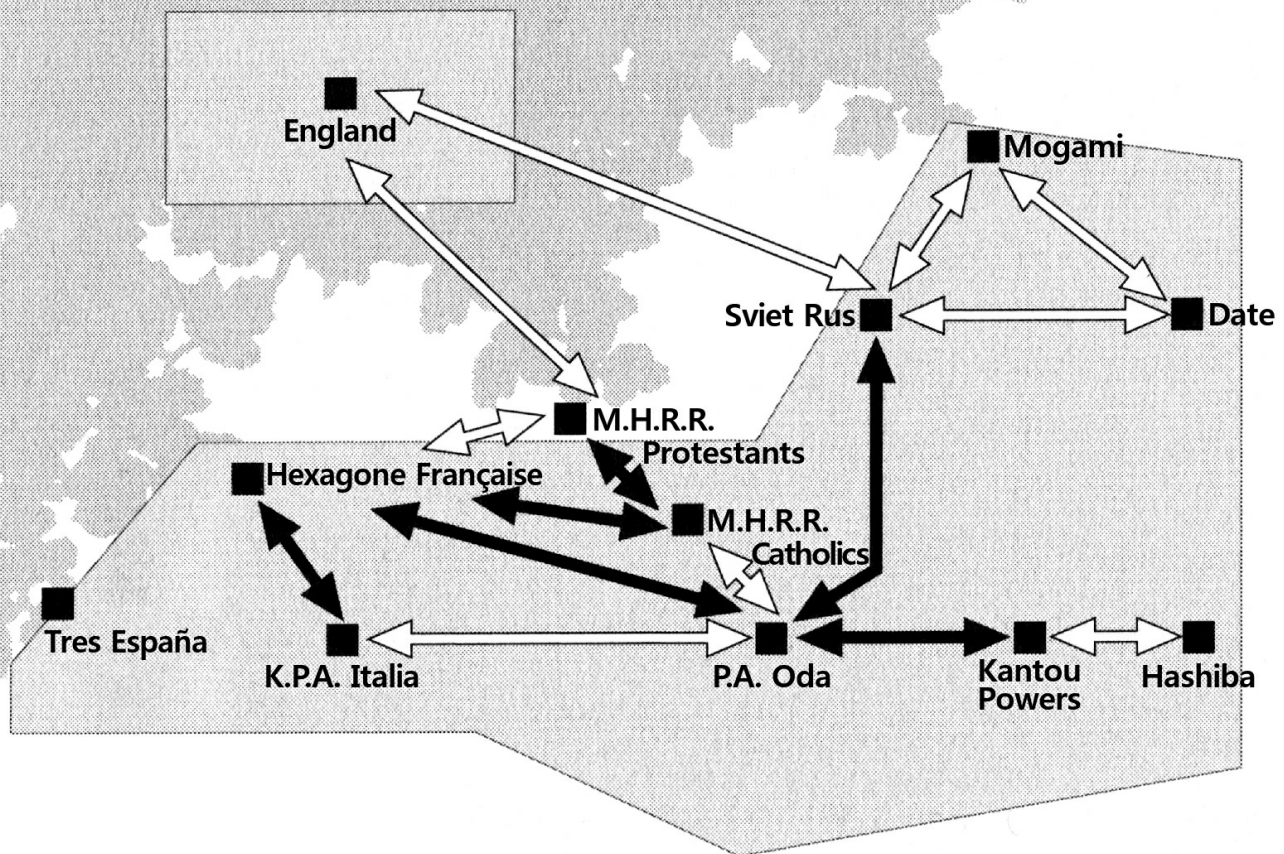
The Story So Far

At Mikawa, Mikawa disappeared and we didn't make any money. At England, I used too much money against the baseball team during the Armada Battle, but we still made a little money. At M.H.R.R., we were betrayed and I had to fight in a super prostration battle to stay with our allies, so we didn't make any money at all. I thought we would make money at Kantou, but the three nations meeting kept that from happening. We were treated like enemies at the special student general assembly for some reason. We were even temporarily stripped of our authority, proving how much of a monster our Vice President is. We are now making a little money selling vegetables.



world

Relationships Between the Major Powers



- Tres España
- ↔ K.P.A. Italia
- ↔ England
- ↔ M.H.R.R. Protestants
- ↔ M.H.R.R. Catholics
- ↔ Hexagone Française
- ↔ P.A. Oda
- Kantou Powers
- ↔ Date
- ↔ Sviet Rus
- ↔ Mogami

↔ Cooperative
↔ Hostile

Anything without an arrow is being left alone or treated with slight caution

Musashi's Plans



"Sis! Sis! We're back from Novgorod, but what are we doing now!?"



"Well, we've found some new problems with the Musashi, so we'll be fixing those while finishing up the 1st term's official events before summer break. And we'll also be looking for a way to carry out the next history recreation. We've got so much to do!"

The Story So Far: At Mikawa, Mikawa disappeared and we didn't make any money. At England, I used too much money against the baseball team during the Armada Battle, but we still made a little money. At M.H.R.R., we were betrayed and I had to fight in a super prostration battle to stay with our allies, so we didn't make any money at all. I thought we would make money at Kantou, but the three nations meeting kept that from happening. We were treated like enemies at the special student general assembly for some reason. We were even temporarily stripped of our authority, proving how much of a monster our Vice President is. We are now making a little money selling vegetables.

Divine Chat Screenname List:

- Azuma: Azuma
- Asama: Asama Tomo
- Obscene: Itou Kenji (Itoken)
- Me: Aoi Toori
- Gold Mar: Margot Naito
- Righteousness: Satomi Yoshiyasu
- Scarred: Mary Stuart
- Silver Wolf: Nate Mitosudaira
- Still Got It: Reine des Garous
- Wise Sister: Aoi Kimi
- 481: Mishina Shouichi
- Tachibana Husband: Tachibana Muneshige
- Tachibana Wife: Tachibana Gin
- Smoking Girl: Naomasa
- 10ZO: Tenzou Crossunite
- Tonbokiri: Honda Futayo
- Sticky King: Nenji
- 83: Hassan Furubushi
- Flat Vassal: Adele Balfette
- Vice President: Honda Masazumi
- Bell: Mukai Suzu

- Hori-ko: Horizon Ariadust
- Mal-Ga: Malga Naruze
- Marube-ya: Heidi Augesvarer
- 847: Mishina Hiro
- Novice: Toussaint Neshinbara
- Musashi King: Yoshinao
- Four Eyes: Shakespeare
- Worshipper: Ohiroshiki Ginji
- Laborer: Noriki
- Unturning: Date Narumi
- Kagetsuna-kun: Katakura Kojuurou
- Fang: Oniniwa Tsunamoto
- Caretaker: Rusu Makikage
- Taki: Takigawa Ichimasu
- Great Upperclassmen: Shibata Katsuie
- O12: Oichi
- Lily Flower: Sassa Narimasa
- Omaeda: Maeda Toshiie
- Fuwaa: Fuwa Mitsuharu
- Mory: Mori Nagayoshi
- Nine Tail Girl: Mogami Yosahiaki
- Shigeko: Honjou Shigenaga
- KageV: Uesugi Kagekatsu
- Tomo-no-Bu: Saitou Tomonobu
- Nagaya-Stable: Ookubo Tadachika
- CAN: Kanou
- Llaf: Fukushima Masanori
- Kiyo-Massive: Katou Kiyomasa
- □□凸: Katagiri Katsumoto
- Kuro-Take: Takenaka Hanbei

Far Eastern Powers: [Same map as in 3-A.]

Relationships Between the Major Powers: [Same as 4-A]

Musashi's Plans:

Toori: Sis! Sis! We're back from Novgorod, but what are we doing now!?

Kimi: Well, we've found some new problems with the Musashi, so we'll be fixing those while finishing up the 1st term's official events before summer break. And we'll also be looking for a way to carry out the next history recreation. We've got so much to do!

School Rules

Article 303 Line 1

- A student's primary duties are to complete his or her schoolwork and take part in the official school events which will instill abundant humanity in the student.

Prologue: Organizer of a New Home

PROLOGUE

"Organizer of a New Home"



Instead of a new beginning
Is it a completion of the old?
Point Allocation (So Busy)

Instead of a new beginning

Is it a completion of the old?

Point Allocation (So Busy)

Morning filled a space.

It was not the sky, nor was it the land. The heavens were an endlessly large ceiling and the earth was a floor just as large as the heavens and 8 ships were situated in the holes in that floor.

There were 3 ships on the port and starboard and 2 ships in the center. The 8 ships formed the giant aerial city ship named Musashi and a gentle summer morning reached it inside the Ariake, its exclusive dock.

Transport ships were flying above and around the ships to deliver the day's cargo and delivery workers were also flying around for intermediary deliveries or deliveries within a single ship.

The smoke from cooking and cleaning rose from the surface areas to decorate the spaces between those ships, so the deliver workers occasionally had to slalom between the pillars of smoke like they were pylons.

Among all that, a group was communicating with each other as they flew back and forth through the sky.

It was a group of 3.

Two of them were a black-winged non-descended angel and a gold-winged fallen angel in track suits.

The last was a white and blue half-dragon.

They were all making deliveries for a job. They would take the packages from the Musashi's ships and the Ariake's delivery districts and then fly to the academy on the stern of Okutama. Their final destination was the front side of the academy building's third floor.

"I can tell the student council room is going to become a storage room for people's crap. They really bring in a lot of stuff when they're focused on their

duties.”

The first to speak was Naruze, the one with black wings and hair. She flew toward Tama’s starboard transportation district on her winged broom *schale besen* while opening a crop mark frame Magie Figur next to her face.

“Margot, how are things with you?”

Naruze reached out toward the Magie Figur and used her pen to draw her partner’s face. And Margot immediately began to move on the screen.

Gold Mar: “Judge. The engine division says they found some more problems after that flip and firing the main cannon.”

The scene on the Magie Figur twirled around. It now displayed the “valley” between Okutama and Musashino. Margot ascended through there with a bucket containing a bundle of paper tubes on the front of her broom.

Gold Mar: I wonder why they’re in the habit of making hard copies of their digitized diagrams.”

“They probably think having the data in multiple forms will help them avoid losing it,” said Naruze. “Writing it onto Orei Metallo is the standard these days, but since Orei Metallo is affected by the ley lines and ether, a powerful burst could erase the contents. But that won’t happen with paper. Of course, paper deteriorates and can burn, so it isn’t perfect either.”

Uqui: “Indeed. Orei Metallo, on the other hand, does not deteriorate much and does not burn. ...So even Catholicism stresses the importance of having a copy in each medium. I hear Rome’s underground library is a library in name only and is instead full of contracts and work reports.”

That comment came from the half-dragon in a Catholic sign frame that appeared. He was flying overhead with his body casually turned on its side.

Uqui: “If records of the Age of the Gods had remained long ago, it would surely have prevented a lot of conflict.”

“We don’t even have a lot of records from a thousand years ago. The Catholics and the Testament Union need to work harder at that. The records

keep getting lost because there isn't a duty to preserve them when another nation takes over or people move from one nation to another. And with local requirements for confidentiality, it isn't an easy problem to fix."

So...

"That's why Drake had to question Mitotsudaira at England and why Yasuhira wanted to lead us into a discussion in Oushuu."

Gold Mar: "That's true. ...And with that underground relief we saw at Novgorod, there's a lot about the Age of Dawn we-ahhhhh!!!"

"What is it, Margot!?"

Gold Mar: "A morning valley wind blew in and I dropped the diagrams. I'm making an emergency descent now. ...Oh, Masa-yan!"

Smoking Girl: "Yeah, I caught those diagrams for you. You're lucky I was putting Suzaku away just now."

A sign frame opened to show Naomasa with the background shaking behind her. She had her back to the hangar entrance on the bottom of Musashino and she had Jizuri Suzaku's hand lift up the bucket so the sign frame could see.

Naruze breathed a sigh of relief as Margot landed on Suzaku's hand and Naomasa turned in her direction.

Smoking Girl: "How about attaching a long container to the bottom of your broom?"

Gold Mar: "I tried renting one of those once, but it spread my legs pretty wide and ended up hurting."

Uqui: "Hey, Naruze. Don't get such violent nosebleeds. I could see it even from way up here."

"Wh-what's wrong with it! I'm free to do what I want!"

Naruze thought to herself as she descended toward the Asama Shrine in central Okutama to pick up a delivery.

...We've been really busy recently with Oushuu and everything...

Judge.

“We’ll be moving onto the next stage soon, so we need to get our official school events done with. ...Next is Houjou, right?”

Gold Mar: “I think we have a fair bit before that. Not only is the Azuchi in Edo, but we’ve looked into it and it won’t be easy for Musashi to directly fight Houjou right away.”

“Yeah, there’s a lot to that. But I bet Masazumi can figure something out since she loves war so much. ...Yes. I think everyone expects the same from her.”

“Before the next battle, I would like to manage the Musashi Mk. 2’s ether supply and construct a defense system...”

Asama was tuning the ship’s ether in the center of the shrine.

That space was also used for Shinto ceremonies, so it was connected to the underground power system and intermediary devices.

In the very center, Asama opened a great many sign frames in the early morning air. They displayed a diagram of the ships, a rough diagram of each ship’s power distribution compiled by the automatons, and a diagram of the ley line connections.

Hanami was busy at times like this too. While Asama checked over the general framework, Hanami checked over the many details and would redirect something to Asama for inspection when she felt the need. The Asama Shrine protected the guard stations and the Musashi Atsuta Shrine that assisted the guards, so she was occasionally sent information from them.

That was mostly reports on mysterious phenomena caused by disturbances in the ley lines and ether, but there were also reports on incidents the guards or Atsuta Shrine had already dealt with. Of course, that was also handled by Hanami who would forward them onto the Public Morals Committee, but...

“Look, look.”

“Eh? Oh, thank you, Hanami. This is the firefight that broke out last night when Toori-kun and the others plotted with the merchants to smuggle in porn games, isn’t it? Yes, half a container’s worth still hadn’t been found, had it?”

The guard station had insisted that the Asama Shrine Representative interrogate the Chancellor, but it would be faster to use an Ootsubaki detection spell to find them.

...And if it was Toori-kun's doing...

She sent a request to “Musashi” for the right to view his management data from the night before and received approval instantly. This had become “business as usual” to the point that even the automatons did not bother to check over it all. So she checked his routes of movement the night before, the spells he used during the smuggling, and asked Hanami to track the ‘molds’ affected by those spells.

“Clap.”

It was all the usual.

...At this time of day, I bet he's at the Blue Thunder...

On Tama's surface area, the bakery/café named the Blue Thunder was preparing to open for the day.

It was located in the business district, so carts, people, and kobolds transporting ingredients and other goods needing distribution were walking back and forth.

It was a busy time of day.

Some Technohexen would occasionally descend from the sky for a delivery and some guards were out on the roofs to direct traffic. All of this hustle and bustle was meant to prepare the shops and restaurants for the people who would soon be arriving.

But something rolled out of the Blue Thunder without warning.

“Kwoh, owwww!”

It was a crossdresser.

The crossdressing idiot flew out onto the road, rolled 5 times, and then tried to zip right back inside the Blue Thunder.

The door slammed shut just before he arrived and he collided with it.

As he slid down to the ground, a silver-haired automaton appeared through the door's glass.

"What is the meaning of this, Toori-sama? What do you mean 'give me a place to hide because they're after me for smuggling porn games'?"

"I-I mean exactly that, Horizon! Those Atsuta guys are in front of my house swinging metal rods around and singing perverted purification songs in a round, so I can't get close! And I hid at Asama's place last time, so they sent people there too! So..."

"Judge. As this is a bakery/café, I can only assume the words 'give me' are followed by a product name. So you would like a product called 'a place to hide because they're after me for smuggling porn games'. Would you like 1 or 2 of those?"

"Umm...I just need enough for me!"

The automaton ignored him. She relocked the door and opened a sign frame.

"I will contact Kimi-sama...except she is doing her morning training. I will contact Asama-sama and Mitotsudaira-sama."

"Oh, I was just thinking of doing that! We need to get our stories straight before we're at the witness stand in court!"

"But first, you need to be arrested and handed over to the guards. I feel bad causing those two so much trouble all the time, but I suppose this is just maintaining the status quo," said Horizon. "Please clean the outside of the shop until they arrive. The black algae creatures are there as well."

"Crossdresser?" asked said creatures. "Crossdresser?"

"Yeah, that's right. I've got my dick hidden away. Wanna see? You do, don't you?"

The idiot was hit by a bucket and ladle thrown via gravitational control.

The crossdresser rolling away, saying something else at the Blue Thunder's entrance, and then falling to his knees all qualified as a single process. The guards directing traffic and everyone else watched as the idiot started

sprinkling water around the entrance, but...

“Okay, bring that box over here! Over to the right!”

They soon got back to their work.

Asama listened to Hanami’s words.

“Horizon wants you at the Blue Thunder. Crossdresser?”

She understood precisely what that meant, but she considered putting it off until later.

...Toori-kun is causing trouble for other people again.

Handing him off to the guards had become her job.

Horizon was also relying on her a lot recently, including with her Shinto contract, so Asama was going all out when it came to looking after him, his sister, and her.

That’s probably not a good thing, she thought, but the worst part was how it kind of made her happy. So...

“Umm.”

To distract herself from the feeling rising within her, she opened the information on Horizon’s contract. With hers and his, she rethought a few of the settings and worked to optimize them. She especially wanted to make sure his distribution spell was always using the best pathways. She had automated a lot of it, but that did not quite keep it at the peak line.

...Not that I want him to have full power when he’s smuggling things like last night...

Not that he would use it then either, she thought with a bitter smile that was also a sign of trust. And...

“Found them.”

Hanami indicated a certain sign frame that showed a bundle of porn games separated out and sunk in a pond in a Murayama nature park.

Asama: “Mito? There are porn games sunk in your territory.”

Silver Wolf: “Eh? Oh, judge. I was just heading out to deal with some porn games that floated up from the bottom of a pond. The people are shouting ‘it’s a treasure trove’ and making a huge fuss about it.”

Hanami found the request and the report concerning that and displayed them. Just to be sure, Asama gave approval for prioritized assistance.

“Now, then.”

Once those are on their way to being incinerated, I should call Toori-kun, she thought as a shadow descended from overhead. She looked up to find...

“Oh, Naruze.”

“Judge. I hear you’re making an anti-air management spell. I’d love to hear about the details, like if you want it to react to dragons, but I’m here to pick up a delivery right now. It needs to get to the student council room, right?”

“I also have a delivery for the faculty room. They need some charms for this week’s health exam.”

“Yeah, that popped up pretty suddenly. I wonder if Masazumi asked for it. Well, it is necessary for our next move.”

As her broom glided along, Naruze made minute adjustments with her secondary wings, but then she smiled.

“Oh? Narumi, you’re working here?”

Next to the main shrine building, Date Narumi wore a shrine maiden outfit and work false arms as she carried a bundle of brooms.

Narumi looked at the Weiss Hexen in a track suit.

She was Malga Naruze. Narumi had learned the names of everyone in Class 3-Plum.

With this Weiss Hexen, it seemed like it would be better for both of them if they only discussed what was absolutely necessary.

So Narumi asked what the Technohexen wanted.

“Is a Technohexen interested in warrior’s part-time job?”

“But you’re a shrine maiden now, aren’t you?”

“This is a temporary form.”

“What part of this is temporary?”

“Judge.” Narumi nodded and used her empty hand to point at the ear-shaped information gathering sensors and the tail ballast. “These parts, I think.”

“I really didn’t expect you to answer that.”

“I don’t make it a habit to lie to people. How about a drawing?”

“Okay, I’ll draw one up. Can I give it to Urquiaga?”

“Go ahead. When you do, tell him I found a good shampoo, so we need to go buy some together once I get back.”

“Ah,” said the Asama Shrine Representative. She touched her own hair and bent her eyes in a smile. “Was ours a good match for your hair? Musashi smells a lot of industrial oil, so it gets rid of that.”

“It was my first time with a Tsubaki type, but it was nice. I really was having trouble with the oil smell.”

Narumi was aware she had a smile on her own face. And then she turned back to the Weiss Hexen.

“About the drawing. Can you draw me ‘as is’ without any weird exaggerations?”

“What? You love him that much? What makes you like him so much?”

“Judge.” Narumi nodded and used her empty hand to touch her head and chest. “These parts of me, I think.”

“I really didn’t expect you to answer that.”

Asama: “Wow! That was an amazingly important line!!”

Smoking Girl: “And it’s looking like those two aren’t actually enemies.”

Gold Mar: “Hm? I think Ga-chan is in a really good mood.”

Azuma: “Eh? R-really?”

Narumi took a breath.

While letting Naruze sketch her, she looked up at the sky visible through the atrium, but all she could see was the Ariake’s ceiling.

...But even this is far larger than the Yonezawa Castle.

A few Date ships had approached recently, but there had been no messages or deliveries for her.

That was unavoidable. She had run off and Masamune was probably being considerate in her own way.

“Come to think of it, Date’s Vice President put out a search request to make a show of looking for you. It described you as ‘always gets calmly angry’, but should I make some kind of response via the Shinto network?”

That was unavoidable. She had run off and Katakura was probably being considerate in his own way.

...Come to think of it, I left without saying anything to mom and dad...

Her parents taught at the elementary school and she had to wonder about the looks on their faces when they had received that sudden notification. Musashi also had an elementary school, but...

“Oh, Masazumi. Why the divine transmission all of a sudden? ...You say Toorikun showed up at the early morning *kanpu masatsu* in the elementary school schoolyard and is making weird noises while rubbing the towel on his crotch? Yes, I think you should notify Kanou-san.”

Narumi could tell something terrible was happening, but as she listened to the divine transmissions the Asama Shrine Representative kept receiving, she started wondering if Musashi had multiple Chancellor/Student Council Presidents.

“Does he have too much time on his hands?”

“It’s probably just that he’s an entertainer. Oh, twist your body a bit.”

Narumi did as instructed and the Weiss Hexen asked her a question.

“You got some money when you left Date, right? Do you really need to work?”

“Having money and working to earn it are not the same thing. And do you really have time to draw while on the job?”

“I make money with this too, so it’s fine.”

And...

“But anyway, I think it’s good that you’re working here.”

“You do?”

“Judge. Most of the outsiders that come to Musashi end up working in the transportation business. The most manpower is needed there and people from about every nation are there, so you can find a lot from your homeland. But...”

But...

“With someone like you, that could get dangerous. There are some who were forced to come here because of you.”

“I won’t let that happen,” cut in the Asama Shrine Representative. She smiled and nodded. “Our gods watch over every part of Musashi. We receive divine protections from them, but they generally don’t interfere in people’s lives. And if they do...”

Narumi understood what the girl was saying. Date was in Oushuu and was thus Shinto. So...

“It would be when one of their musicians is about to take on the greatest form of loss. In other words...if they decide one of their musicians is about to commit a crime, they will intervene by reporting it or providing defenses.”

“Yes.” The Asama Shrine Representative nodded deeply. “Shinto is accepting of everything. And that applies to everyone. Well, things can get troublesome when it comes to different gods within Shinto, but it’s generally all placed on the same level.”

“In other words, I’m safe?”

“It would mean that, yes. If there is any danger,” said the Asama Shrine Representative, “it comes from outside Musashi. From the current state of the world.”

Asama has pretty sharp intuition with this kind of thing, thought Naruze.

Her statement was based on the assumption that Narumi was on their side, that she was one of them.

The contract for someone living under the Asama Shrine’s management made Naruze a musician of their gods, so it was only natural for Asama to say that as the shrine’s representative.

The rest was an issue of how Narumi herself viewed it, but...

“That’s right.” Narumi adjusted her grip on the bundle of bamboo brooms. “You’ve given me a place to stay after I left my home, so I’ll repay you for that at least.”

Oh? thought Naruze while mentally bending back.

...How much did that stupid half-dragon do to this girl?

But if she was joining their side, she would be a powerful addition.

“I like the sound of this. ...Masazumi said she’s holding a strategy meeting in the student council room this morning, so maybe I should tell her about this. It could expand our options.”

“Would it be overly self-conscious of me to say ‘feel free’?”

“You’re a former Vice Chancellor, aren’t you? I’m only a 4th Special Duty Officer, so you don’t need to worry about my feelings.”

“But I’m a complete amateur in Musashi.”

“Then I’ll just say thanks.”

Naruze finished the drawing and did not hesitate to send it to Urquiaga.

At the bow of Okutama, Naito was making a special delivery at the cargo

management office's windowsill.

There was a lot of paperwork from the engine division, but Technohexen insisted on handling paperwork at windows or in midair.

However, she saw something while speaking with a student from the administrative bureau's industrial committee.

"Oh?"

Something fell from the sky and crashed into a watchtower on the port side transportation district.

She heard a few wooden containers split and splinter and she saw smoke rise from where someone had been flying moments before.

Flat Vassal: "Wow, that scared me! 2nd Special Duty Officer! Why did you drop from the sky all of a sudden!? I was on my morning run and I thought something had happened!"

Righteousness: "Huh? Um, Vassal, so this isn't normal for you? It counts as weird? I'm supposed to be surprised?"

Flat Vassal: "Eh? Oh, judge. This isn't normal at all, but the 2nd Special Duty Officer is tough, so you don't need to worry about it. More importantly...ahh, over here, everyone! All that barking isn't going to help, so come back over here!"

Righteousness: "Why do the dogs listen to you like that? Your virtues? Or what?"

I see Yoshy's still a Musashi beginner, thought Naito as she checked over the paperwork with a pen.

Then she squinted toward the crash site.

Gold Mar: "So what happened, Uqui? Is this a part of your training?"

Uqui: "No, when I saw the drawing Naruze made, I ended up doing some distracted flying."

Girls: "Wow..."

Sounds about right, she thought, but she was on a job right now.

“Oh, is this good enough for a signature? There’s a lot from outside this time, so I’ll be back around later.”

“Judge,” said the other girl with a smile and a nod, so Naito left the windowsill. She opened a Magie Figur above her broom, inputted the autopilot instructions, and sent her route to the management office to make sure there weren’t any accidents. That would mean nothing to the delivery workers not following a set course, but her course avoided the standard altitude they used. And...

“But, Uqui, I’m kind of glad you’re so honest to your instincts.”

Uqui: “There is no point in fighting your instincts when it comes to harmless things.”

Mal-Ga: “You’re nothing at all like a certain ninja we could mention who keeps playing porn games even after landing a wife.”

10ZO: “I haven’t recently! I really haven’t!”

Scarred: “I’m not sure what this is about, but I have not noticed Master Tenzou feeling himself down below recently. I was right to discuss it with the rest of you.”

Novice: “Just looking at this, it sounds like we castrated him.”

Worshiper: “But, Tenzou-kun, if you’re not using porn games, then what are you doing?”

Bell: “Eh? Doing...about what?”

Asama: “Just so everyone knows, I’m not saying anything about that one. Nothing at all.”

Almost Everyone: “You just did!!”

The log scrolled by so fast lately that it was hard to keep up.

Anyone who was not on Asama’s level had difficulty leaving an impact on the conversation.

...Everyone’s leveling up now that we’re in the 3rd year.

And as she thought about that...

“Huh?”

“What is it, Margot?”

“Oh, well, it’s Imperial Boy and...”

How rare, she said to herself.

“Miriam. They do go outside sometimes, but usually not this far.”

Naito saw the two of them on Okutama’s deck.

A girl in wheelchair and wrapped in a blanket was palely lit by the sign frames floating in the sky and Azuma was buying some snacks from a stand on the edge of the deck.

The stand’s owner tried to refuse payment from Azuma, but Azuma ultimately forced the owner to take it and instead received a bonus snack for the translucent girl standing by his side.

He’s really become an upstanding kind of person, hasn’t he? thought Naito about Azuma.

Lately, he had apparently been working part-time around the academy thanks to Oriotorai. After all...

...He’s got a family.

“Ga-chan, there’s some doujinshi material wandering around in the wild here.”

“Eh? Where, where?”

She sent Naruze a diagram of Okutama’s bow deck and their location.

“Looks like they’re taking a walk outside for a change of pace,” said Naruze. “Azuma’s probably giving this all a lot of thought since he’s a former imperial on the Musashi as we try to take over the world. ...I have about 3 different ways for this to go in my plot.”

“That’s my Ga-chan.”

“Of course. Since I’m working, I’ll record this with an observation spell.”

“Judge,” said Naito while glancing over at Naruze as her own broom carried her on autopilot.

She checked her Magie Figur for a list of her next deliveries.

“The next one is from England. ...With the three nations meeting over, we can accept things from Europe again. I’m grateful, but it makes us even busier.”

“Being busy is wonderful thing. Isn’t that right, Asama?”

“That’s right,” said Asama with a bitter smile as she watched Naruze gently float up into the sky.

She waved goodbye and thought to herself.

...After the Battle of Novgorod, Musashi is now connected to all of the Far East.

Kantou could not trade directly with the rest of the Far East, but just like Mikawa before them, they had set up methods of intermediary and indirect trade to nearly erase the divides between nations.

As the representative of the Asama Shrine, it meant a lot that they could communicate with Europe via Sviet Rus. Driving Shibata’s forces from Sviet Rus had played a role there.

“Now Sviet Rus’s Shinto network doesn’t have to divert any resources to Shibata’s forces.”

Information on what Shibata’s forces had done after withdrawing from Sviet Rus had arrived with the Student Council and with her. Divine transmissions and ether were a shrine’s specialty. And based on the data on Shibata’s forces’ movements...

...They’re doing a lot of ley line transportation.

That was probably connected to their experiment in carrying in a Testamenta Arma. They were letting their funds do the talking and buying up a lot of access to the Shinto network. The network was based on the ley lines, so they had likely transferred in ether fuel and ether-based weapons while aware they would deteriorate in transit. Meaning...

...They're taking the ether cannon shells and other weapons that are used like fuel, turning them into Orei Nero, and sending them through the ley lines. Then they draw them out where they need them.

Using the ley lines as a storage space was not a special technique. That was how Horizon and Gin's dual pitch space and alternate phase space worked. Depending on the power used and the specific conditions, physical objects could likely be transported as well.

What was special about this was using massive funding to monopolize the ley lines to use a "thicker" portion of the ley lines and connect that to the ley line storage space.

That allowed them to share a large ley line storage space between their various bases.

Shinto managed the pathways, but they could not do this. If the managers monopolized so much space, it would inconvenience the users. If they did try it, the ley line network centered on IZUMO would have to be greatly rethought.

"Buying up the pipeline to each of their bases has to be a real pain though."

Only P.A. Oda could pull that off.

They were the most powerful nation in the center of the Far East.

And their primary base was most likely Lake Biwa Azuchi where Nobunaga was.

The weapons placed in the ley line storage space there could be shared at their other bases. It was limited to things like fuel and ether shells, but the Testamenta Arma and upper-level divine weapons were made from an ether base, meaning they would not break apart even when stored in the ley lines. They were the same as Ex. Collbrande in that way. So...

...When inspecting people entering Musashi, we need to check for ley line connections.

They needed to get the word out that they were performing that inspection so no one would bother trying it.

There was so much to do. But...

“Right.”

This kind of support was a shrine maiden’s job. It was the Asama Shrine’s role.

I need to look after Toori-kun and Horizon while doing the rest of this right too, Asama told herself while raising her eyebrows and nodding.

At that moment, a few people arrived up the stairs in front of her.

“...Huh? Mary...works here, so that makes sense, but what are Kimi, Futayo, the Tachibana Couple, Masazumi, and Mito doing here?”

Asama asked them why they were here while she adjusted the ship’s ether sharing settings.

“Especially you, Kimi. Our spring got a little bent during that side flip. Masa will be coming by to fix it later, but we have to use the indoor bath until then. Is that okay with you?”

“Heh heh. Don’t just assume people are always here to use your bath. That’s only 5 times every 3 days.”

Asama thought about that frequency.

“Ah, that means you’re using it when I’m not here, doesn’t it!? Hey, dad!”

Asama Father: “What’s wrong with that!?”

She had a feeling there was a note of pride in that and he was the senior representative, so she left it to him.

Then the idiot sister placed a hand over her mouth and smiled.

“Your dad hasn’t changed, I see.”

After reaching the top of the stairs she looked back at Futayo and the others following her.

“Heh heh. You want to know why we’re here, don’t you? Then I’ll tell you. The samurai girl, the peerless couple, and I are doing a bit of training. They wanted somewhere with gravel to help train their balance, but they say Principal Sakai’s yard was messed up a fair bit last time.”

“So you’re using my place... So, um, what about Masazumi and Mito?”

“Wait just a moment,” said Gin. She tilted her head and glanced at Kimi. “Can we really train at the shrine of Musashi’s Shinto representative?”

“Yes, that’s just fine. ...Kimi has limited high-level Ootsubaki privileges. And when a civilian holds such a high position, the Ootsubaki gods would actually get mad if we didn’t give them a place to train. And Kimi, you’re actually going to do this right with a proper spell and everything, aren’t you?”

“Judge. My mom won’t shut up about using Turning Point to teach the fundamentals to the beginners and anyone still acting on instinct. And I’ll level out the gravel afterwards.”

“I’ll take care of that,” said Narumi’s voice from between the main shrine building and the residence. “Shinto Representative, could I watch their training a bit?”

“Have you finished the job you were working on?”

“Judge. Then I can?”

Narumi stepped out from behind the main shrine building.

Gin gave an impressed “oh” when she looked to Narumi’s feet, but Asama did not understand why. But since Muneshige nodded, the former Date Vice Chancellor must have demonstrated her skill.

“Okay,” said Kimi as she brought everyone to the starboard side of the shrine.

Masazumi, Mitotsudaira, and Mary stayed behind.

But Mary bowed to Asama.

“Um, I read up through the birth of the gods in the Far Eastern Shinto mythology book you lent me. Can I get some supplementary information later? And is my change of clothes ready for my shift?”

“Oh, of course. You’re free to enter the document room and the residence. Our gods always celebrate when you visit, Mary, so it’s a good omen.”

“My,” she said with a smile while heading to the residence to change.

That left the other two.

“What is it, Masazumi and Mito?”

“Well, I thought we would hold a strategy meeting in the student council room and then prepare for the official school events.” Masazumi shrugged in her track suit. “But Tsukinowa has gotten a little bigger, so I thought I would buy some Mouse snacks. I found the shop down below still isn’t open and was wondering how to kill some time when Mitotsudaira and the others showed up, so I just followed them up here.”

“You could have come here right away and I would have served you some tea.”

“Then I’ll do that next time. Now, as for Mitotsudaira...”

“Judge.” The silver wolf in a track suit nodded, lightly brushed up her hair, and smiled a little. “I’m here for you.”

“For me?”

“Judge. I’ve retrieved the porn games that floated up in the park pond and ‘Tama’ contacted me to say the Chancellor is at the Blue Thunder. Horizon is asking for us as well, so won’t you come too? I did ask if we would just be in the way, but she said not to worry about it.”

I seeeee, thought Asama. And...

“Um, but this is Okutama. If he’s at the Blue Thunder on Tama, Mito, couldn’t you have gone there without going so far out of your way?”

“W-well, uh, I didn’t really want to go alone.”

Mitotsudaira’s face grew red as she answered.

Just as Asama wondered what that coloration meant, Kimi looked back and spoke quietly while walking off to starboard.

“Oh, dear. Asama isn’t the same as Mitotsudaira here? How strange.”

Eh? thought Asama.

...I’m usually the same as Mito?

Height: no. Hair: no. Skin: no. Butt: no. Chest: no. Breasts: no. Boobs: no.

...How are we ever the same?

“Tomo! Tomo! Is it just me or did you start staring at my chest toward the end of whatever you were thinking about!?”

“Um, no, no. It’s just that Kimi seemed to say there’s something about us that’s the same...”

Mitotsudaira’s shoulders lowered as she muttered a single word.

“Novgorod.”

...Eh?

Asama thought about that place name while watching the wolf lower her blushing face.

...Did something happen there?

She thought back over it all in order.

Before arriving, the Musashi did a side flip and gently fired its main cannon.

Then I focused on my peaceful work without joining the battle.

Yes, I did shoot down some enemy gods of war when they got a little “hya ha!”, but that still counts as peaceful.

“Then I went to Novgorod to protect and support Toori-kun, Mito and the others...”

We went underground, saw the relief, had the Double Border Crest sort of appear, and watched William, Prince of Orange, go missing while he was naked.

After that, we escaped and fired the Musashi’s main cannon, but what about that is the same for me and Mito?

...Nothing?

No, there was something. It was nothing she had done and it was more of a play on words than anything, but they had sort of confirmed their relative positions. And Kimi had teased her about it.

“W-wait, um...”

Asama tried to stop that from rising from the depths of her memories, but...

...*Wah*.

Rise it did.

Yes. Horizon had said she wanted to be with everyone.

And Asama had responded by saying they should continue on together.

So Kimi had teasingly said Horizon was announcing the creation of a harem and that Asama's response meant...

"Wahyahhhh!!"

"Oh?" Mary tilted her head after changing and stepping back outside. "Um, where is Lady Asama?"

"Eh? Oh, um, Tomo is..."

Mitotsudaira blushed, gave off an aura of joy, and trailed off. Kimi looked back while wearing a track suit and doing the front splits on the gravel.

The Tachibana Couple and Futayo were doing the same, but Futayo lost her balance and fell to the side and Kimi had to prop her up with a hand.

"Asama said something about wicked thoughts and went to go purify herself."

"Purify herself?"

"Judge. She should be back out soon. ...After all, she can't use the spring right now."

"Kwaaaahh!!"

After a cry of anger, barefoot footsteps ran down the walkway from the spring behind the main shrine building.

Mary looked back and briefly saw black hair and a yukata.

She heard the door to the residence forcefully open and close, but at the same time...

"Something wonderful must have happened to Lady Asama."

Mary put her hands on her cheeks and felt a smile on her lips.

Then ether flowers bloomed above her head. The other girl's mood had improved her own. A few water lilies made of ether blossomed around her and Ex. Caliburn's right blade changed angle as if raising its head and then swung its pommel left and right.

She laughed before hearing Asama's voice from the residence.

"Cooooold! C-clear your mind and the temperature won't matter!!"

"Isn't that a Buddhist concept?" asked Mitotsudaira. "And isn't it about a hot flame, not cold water?"

"Heh heh. And Asama always uses a warm water spring, so I think she's forgotten how a real water purification works."

Masazumi merely tilted her head and frowned.

"Anyway, I think I'll stop by the Blue Thunder for breakfast. If Asama is doing a water purification, I'll wait until she's done. Aoi Sister, Mary, can you two look after things here? We're going to be busy starting today."

"That's true." Mitotsudaira lightly crossed her arms and looked into the unseen western sky. "Based on the recent information from Hexagone Française, Hashiba's forces have finally invaded Mouri territory. Their forces should collide mid-morning today."

"That's right. And on this end of things, the Azuchi Castle in Edo will apparently move toward Mouri to take the Tottori Castle's place. So I need to check with Asama on some things and we need to think about how to respond to this."

Narumi suddenly looked Masazumi's way.

"Since this is before summer break, we're going to be busy completing the official school events too. ...What is our current goal?"

"Well," answered Masazumi. "That would be Houjou."

Masazumi spoke as everyone else there held their breath.

"Houjou is the key to Kantou after Nobunaga's death. Most of Kantou's

actions come from Houjou and they battle Matsudaira twice. So if possible, I want to have Houjou make those post-Nobunaga actions to apply pressure to Hashiba. But most active inter-academy actions are forbidden during summer break, so it's a mystery how far we can get with that beforehand."

But...

"But most of the small nations and mid-sized nations like Houjou have no future. Matsudaira will be the ultimate victors, so they'll probably be fairly stubborn about going after us. Like Sanada the other day."

"So we will be on the receiving end of the losers' resentment before they've even lost..."

"That's right. We will prove ourselves by brushing aside that pressure. ...We will accept their stubbornness, their obligations, and the futures and ideals they had in mind. But..."

"But?"

"According to the Testament, the Siege of Odawara that destroys Houjou is led by Hashiba with Matsudaira's support. And before that, P.A. Oda's Takigawa is sent in to supervise Kantou but gets driven out by Houjou. Houjou is currently under Takigawa's supervision, so I wonder what they're going to do about that."

Whatever the case, these were things that had to happen.

So Masazumi continued while thinking about what she expected the idiot would say at times like this.

"We will continue fighting to create a nation that can fulfill all of their ideals in some form. The coming battles will have their issues, but they're meant to prove we can do that."

"Heh heh. Yes, we really are going to be busy."

I'm here for you.



“Judge. Please, everyone. We’ll also be busy at the academy with the official events, but...”

Masazumi filled her lungs with the morning air.

“Now that we’ve recovered, we can see the path we need to follow.”

I’m here for you

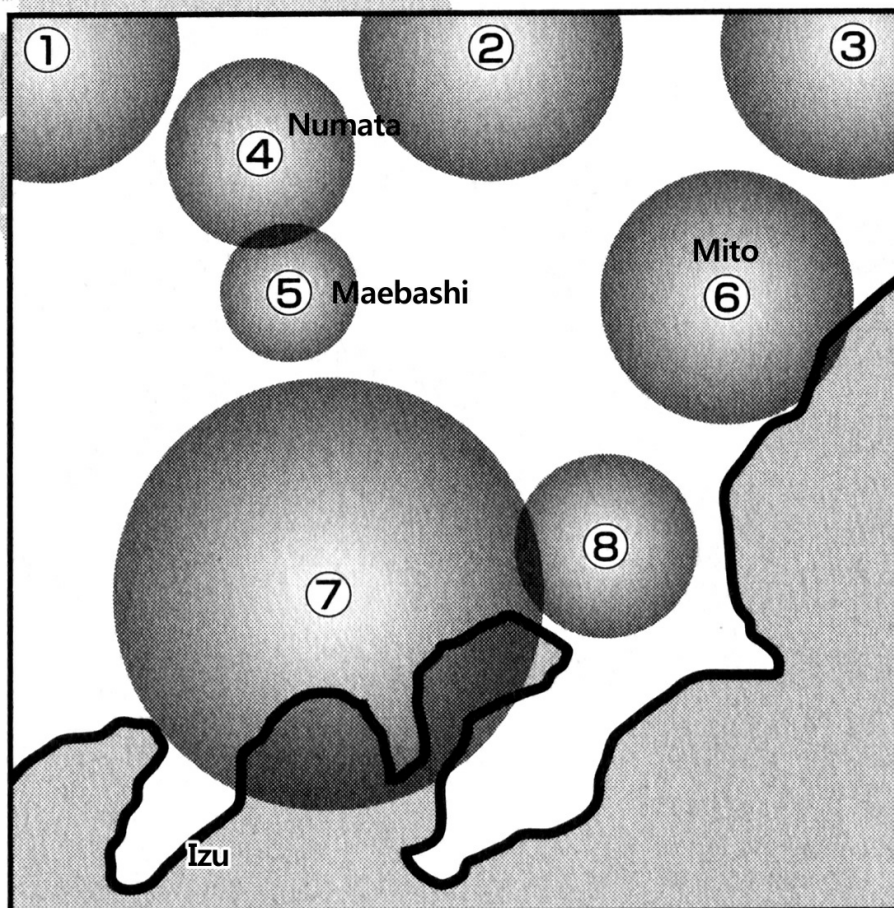
● Forces in Kantou and the Nearby Areas ●



"Sis! Sis! This might be late, but what are things like right now in Kantou and thereabouts?"



"Heh heh heh. Kan brother. It is very late for that, but here's a look at the neighborhood, okay?"



① Sviet Rus

④ Sanada

⑦ Houjou

② Mogami

⑤ Takigawa

⑧ Hashiba

③ Date

⑥ Musashi in Ariake



"Has Kantou just been forgotten?"



"According to the Testament, Matsudaira worked with Oda to take over Takeda territory after that clan fell, but P.A. Oda is focused on Mouri right now. At the same time, Takigawa is sitting there and watching over things in Kantou and Hashiba's Azuchi Castle is there in Edo. And Sanada is nearby after the trouble they caused, so it's all so very troublesome."



"Isn't there anything good about this place?"



"The three nations at the top are on our side, so we have a place to escape to if need be. But we need to clear our own way from now on, so we need to work really hard, okay?"



"We'd better decide soon which one of them to escape to..."



"Hey, don't give up so quickly."

Study:

Forces in Kantou and the Nearby Areas

Toori: Sis! Sis! This might be late, but what are things like right now in Kantou and thereabouts?

Kimi: Heh heh heh. Kan brother. It is very late for that, but here's a look at the neighborhood, okay?

Right of 4: Numata

Right of 5: Maebashi

Above 6: Mito

Below 7: Izu

1: Sviet Rus

2: Mogami

3: Date

4: Sanada

5: Takigawa

6: Musashi in Ariake

7: Houjou

8: Hashiba

Toori: Has Kantou just been forgotten?

Kimi: According to the Testament, Matsudaira worked with Oda to take over Takeda territory after that clan fell, but P.A. Oda is focused on Mouri right now. At the same time, Takigawa is sitting there and watching over things in Kantou and Hashiba's Azuchi Castle is there in Edo. And Sanada is nearby after the

trouble they caused, so it's all so very troublesome.

Toori: Isn't there anything good about this place?

Kimi: The three nations at the top are on our side, so we have a place to escape to if need be. But we need to clear our own way from now on, so we need to work really hard, okay?

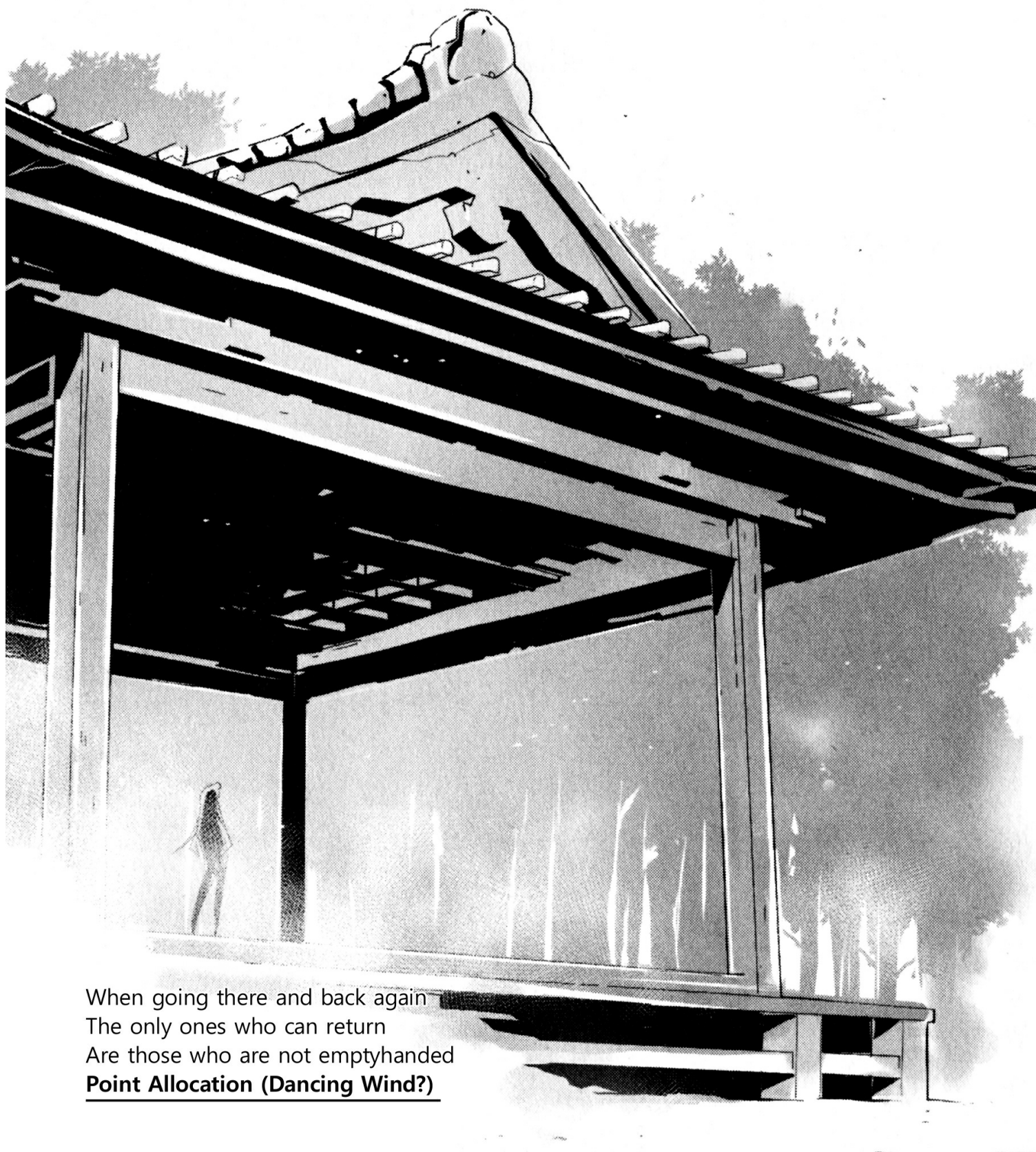
Toori: We'd better decide soon which one of them to escape to...

Kimi: Hey, don't give up so quickly.

Chapter 1: Pilgrims in a Shaded Place

CHAPTER 1

"Pilgrims in a Shaded Place"



When going there and back again
The only ones who can return
Are those who are not emptyhanded
Point Allocation (Dancing Wind?)

When going there and back again

The only ones who can return

Are those who are not emptyhanded

Point Allocation (Dancing Wind?)

Something dark existed at the bottom of the morning air: shadows.

A dark shade was cast below the green ceiling of the forest.

But that shade did not fill one place: a clearing at the top of a slope.

A manmade structure existed in the center of that early morning forest clearing.

It was a Shinto shrine with a dark thatch roof.

The gate at the entrance said “Yamaga Shrine” and bore the six coin emblem of the Sanada Academy, but they were both very old and the six coins of the academy emblem were half consumed by moss.

The gate sat open and the shrine’s *shimenawa* were old.

“Toh.”

A voice came from the stage remade with a new roof and floor to the right of the shrine.

It was a shrine stage.

A woman stood on the wooden floor with her legs spread horizontally and her body twisted.

She wore a red track suit with the words “Sanada Ten Braves: Unno Rokurou” stitched on the back.

She was moving.

She bent her body forward and placed just the index finger, middle finger, and thumb of both hands on the floor.

“Hoh.”

She then raised her body up atop her hands and shoulders.

She performed a handstand.

Unno's movements were not rushed. She raised her body upside-down slowly, as if kneading something. But then she bent her legs behind her and formed an arch by placing the soles of her feet on the back of her head.

"Oh?"

She heard a loud sound in the distance.

It was a gunshot. And when she heard it...

"Kakei, huh? Nezu wouldn't make that noise. ...Toh!"

She swung her legs back up like two whips.

She used the movement to push her hands down on the floor and twist her body.

"Two rotations."

Her right toes landed on the floor. She was standing tall.

Her body did not waver and she made a large rotation with the arms stretched out to the sides before lowering them.

She released a long breath, reached down for the towel on the floor, and balanced her body in a T-shape.

She grabbed the white towel and pulled.

"Oh."

The towel did not quite come with her hand. It was heavy. Heavier than the original fabric had been.

But after a few more tugs, it stretched and dangled down like it had a weight attached but finally reached her hand.

She returned her body to normal and took a breath. She wiped away her sweat and looked to the shrine.

The morning sun shined on it and her eyes focused below the roof.

"Maybe I should arrange for some repairs. The older young master is out of

the question and I can't expect anything from the young master or our teachers. ...Honestly, what are we supposed to do when the one in charge of repairs first is the first one we lose?"

Unno sighed and narrowed her eyes toward the old *shimenawa* and the wooden steps that always looked damp these days.

"Well, the Musashi returned and if Hashiba really is sending the Azuchi Castle out of Edo for the invasion of Mouri, they'll probably be making their next move soon. I guess this is our only chance. For fixing up this place...and for working as a shrine maiden here."

"How many years has it been since I arrived here?" wondered Unno as she placed a hand on the shrine stage's pillar and looked around. "To think the local delinquent girl would end up being a shrine maiden in a foreign land."

After wandering as the Unneeded, she and the others had arrived in Sanada and trained under their predecessors. That was when she had learned that the Yamaga Shrine, Sanada's primary shrine, had no shrine maiden.

Since ancient times, shrine maidens had delighted the gods and curried the gods' favor to hear their words.

The Kabuki dancing Unno was trained in was originally based off of the Kagura dancing. So when she had been urged and coaxed into climbing onto the shrine stage and dancing, a certain thought had come to mind: ...*What is this?*

Nothing happened.

She had been licensed in shrine maiden techniques. She had had a mid-level license at the time. That should have been plenty for the god to respond to the call of her dance.

But no matter how much she danced, nothing happened. The same was true of the divine spells produced by this shrine.

Of course nothing happened, she recalled Kakei saying with a laugh. *We're outsiders.*

She agreed with that.

A god would not immediately accept just anyone who came to its land. Most were accepted only after participating in a local festival.

And even divine spells did not provide their power to everyone equally. When using a charm or a prayer, there was always a god on the other end and that god was watching. The major shrines and brand name spells had a system to control that and ensure a bare minimum effect, but...

“The local spells here don’t have anything like that.”

She had felt like the god was forsaking her as an outsider.

Kakei had been making a point when he mentioned that. He liked to lecture. A lot had apparently happened to him in the past, so he and his ninja techniques could be cynical when it came to the gods.

But back then, she had only been able to sigh.

...Outsiders.

But Unno had realized that their predecessors, who had become their teachers, had regretful, baffling, and lonely looks on their faces.

So at the time, she had scratched her head, kicked Kakei, said “well of course we are”, and left.

The next morning, she had made sure no one was looking and climbed onto the shrine stage.

She had never failed to do her dance training. But that time, she had moved from a random clearing or field and had instead done it on the official shrine stage.

That was the only difference.

But a thought had occurred to her.

...What do you mean we’re outsiders? Are we going to stay that way forever?

She had felt something like anger, but it really came down to how she thought about it. It was entirely possible to live one’s life while thinking having a home was not necessary.

Could she do that?

She had not liked being an outsider and had not wanted to remain one.

But wasn't that just her dislike of the word "outsider"? Once they no longer saw her as an outsider here, wouldn't she relax and decide she could leave once more?

"I was really just playing around with how I defined myself."

Or was I? she thought while looking to the rising sun.

Yamaga Shrine was in Shinshu. That was the central region just west of Kantou. But...

"Is the Ariake in that direction?"

She looked to the east through the forest. A vast plain continued as far as she could see beyond the mountains and forest.

She could not see all the way to the ocean, but...

"It's 10 kilometers long and 3 kilometers above Mito, so it would have to be around there..."

The Ariake was inside a stealth barrier. She formed a rectangular frame with her fingers to judge the distance. She had done this countless times since returning here. However...

"Is there any point in looking at it?"

A voice reached her from the mountain. A tall skinny figure in a summer uniform was descending from the mountain path into the forest.

"Oh, Kakei."

Kakei did not enter the shrine's grounds. He held up the prize in his right hand so Unno could see.

"Yeah, I caught a mountain bird, but I guess the god won't let me in here."

"Huh?"

Unno nodded her head and waved her hands back and forth.

Is that a yes or a no? he thought while glaring at her, but then she spoke.

“Because it’s unclean? If it’s a corpse, our god will embrace it. ...Use it as an offering and it’s all good.”

“This is for breakfast, so I only caught the one.”

Kakei went out of his way to remain in the bushes dividing the shrine from the forest.

And Unno opened her mouth horizontally.

“You can walk through here if you want.”

“If I get the water clinging to me, it’ll affect my footwork. My legs aren’t as strong as Sasuke’s.”

“You’re not too bad yourself, Kakei.”

“That’s because I focus on close-range and circling around people. I focus on indoor stuff, so I’m no good without a flat surface. Sasuke really is impressive.”

That was true. Each of the Unneeded had their own special skills, but Sasuke was the most skilled martial artist.

...I’m only any good at taking up a position and circling behind people.

That was for assassinations. It was admittedly very ninja-like, but...

“I really don’t like running around.”

“Is that so?” asked Unno as she hopped down from the shrine stage. She slipped on her sandals and pursued him as he walked around the shrine grounds.

“What are Sasuke and Saizou doing?” she asked. “You were waiting above since last night for them to contact you, right?”

“They say they’re traveling around Jouetsu and P.A. Oda before returning here. They said to take it easy until then.”

“Did you tell them about Isa?”

“They said they already knew.”

“Is that so?” asked Unno as she looked up into the sky.

A silhouette passed through the sky. It was a slow but large movement.

“A dragon... The various peoples have been on the move ever since Date began to move.”

“The confusion caused by the Musashi outsiders has set even the big ones in motion.”

“I imagine so. But, Kakei...do you think Musashi sees themselves as outsiders?”

“Things might feel different when you’re up in the sky.”

“Then,” she said. “How can they do all that stupid stuff?”

He knew what she wanted to say. It was true that Musashi was a dangerous group that would chat amongst themselves and do stupid things even in the middle of battle. But...

“I bet they have their own sadness.”

“Oh, I get it,” said Unno. “Then I bet Musashi doesn’t even need to think that they’re outsiders. That status had permeated their beings.”

“What makes you say that?”

“When something sad has happened to someone, they’ll try to live without regrets.”

“...Unno, did you hit your head recently?”

The stone she kicked flew accurately, so...

“That was close.”

He shot it down.

His one hand still held the string tying up the mountain bird and his other hand was still in his pocket.

But a shot fired out of empty air and accurately shattered the stone.

The gunshot echoed across the shrine grounds and Unno quietly whistled.

“Well, that’s a man loved by a god for you. You’re really detailed.”

“And that’s why I can’t carelessly enter another god’s shrine. I’m fine with making a mess of an enemy shrine, though. ...Oh, but the gunshot won’t be a

problem, right?”

“You didn’t ask about the one earlier.”

“That wasn’t me.”

Unno looked puzzled, so Kakei smiled a little and explained.

“It was Nezu. ...He’s been retraining since he got back here.”

“Oh, how adorable of him.”

Someone arrived from the stone steps leading to the shrine’s entrance, presumably after noticing their conversation.

“Nezu.”

Unno picked up her pace. She caught up with Kakei as he circled around beyond the torii and stepped out onto the path to the shrine. She then looked down the steps leading up to the shrine.

“Nezu? What is it?”

Nezu looked up at her, raised his eyebrows, and looked away. He instead looked at Kakei next to her. And he spoke to that tall figure in a summer uniform.

“You’re supposed to take over monitoring Houjou from P.A. Oda. When Anayama answered, he said to send out whoever we could and he said that meant, ‘Kakei, Unno, and Mochizuki’.”

“Three people?” asked Kakei. “Isn’t that a bit much for replacing Miyoshi? It’s always been two at the most before.”

Nezu’s eyes alone darted from one to the other, and...

“The Azuchi will apparently start for Mouri tonight.”

“Yeah, I had mostly figured that one out. And?”

“This is only Anayama’s speculation, but he thinks Takigawa’s unit alone won’t be enough personnel to keep an eye on Houjou.”

“Or to be more accurate, to keep an eye on Houjou and Musashi in the

Ariake. ...Not even the Shirasagi Castle can watch over the entire nation.”

Unno sighed.

...If Sasuke was here, I'm sure he would have had some ideas about how to distribute us.

Three of them were enough of a fighting force. Ninja were trained to cause disturbances and make attacks and they were at the Special Duty Officer level. If Houjou tried to do something, they could directly hold them back or cause a diversion elsewhere.

“Then this might be a good chance to score some points with P.A. Oda.”

Hearing that, Nezu looked to Kakei with his eyebrows somewhat raised.

“Kakei, I can also-...”

“Noooo, you can't. You have to help with Yuri's rehabilitation, don't you?”

“When the Azuchi leaves Kantou, isn't the Tottori Castle going to arrive? Once the warship has left, Houjou has its automaton Fuma Ninja. Takigawa's unit can handle that since they're a ninja unit, but they can't do anything to overcome Houjou's knowledge of the land. They barely ever descend from the Shirasagi Castle, after all.”

“What a pain,” sighed Unno. “So they'll really be overstaying their welcome, will they? We'll have to look after them until things settle down in Edo and Houjou.”

“These annoying odd jobs are also a ninja's job,” said Kakei as he started down the steps.

Then he used his left hand to hand Nezu something.

It was a long needle. It was 10 cm long, meant to be thrown, and made for assassinations, but...

“Protect the place while I'm gone. Got that?”

“Kakei, that's a death flag.”

“No, I've just got way too many of these things. Every time I need something, you'll get more weapons, Nezu. Your ninja technique can fire these things,

right?”

“You’ve already given me more than 100 of them...”

Noting a hint of exasperation in Nezu’s voice, Unno also started down the steps.

Nezu followed suit and quickly lined up alongside Kakei in front of her. After glancing back at her, he asked Kakei a question.

“Um, Kakei, who is that pretty person behind us? Is she your wife?”

“Try to remember what I look like without my makeup, you imbecile!”

Unno kicked Nezu down the stairs.

...Honestly.

While they were doing this, Hashiba and Musashi were preparing.

“Musashi is probably going to try something when the Azuchi Castle moves today. Mouri is combined with Hexagone Française and that makes them a powerful enemy for Hashiba, but that’s exactly why Musashi will want to do something here to leave Mouri feeling indebted to them. That means we might have something to do as well.”

“But the real stars aren’t us or Musashi. That position goes to Mouri since they’re the ones pulling in the Azuchi Castle.” Kakei smiled bitterly. “Of course, Hexagone Française has a bunch of ridiculously powerful people like that Reine des Garous, so who knows if they’ll feel any kind of debt even if Musashi does put up a fight over here.”

There was a dark space.

It was a bedroom.

It was a large room with a tall ceiling. The walls had wallpaper and the ceiling was decorated too. Decorative windows positioned from waist height to the ceiling let in plenty of morning light.

The sunlight arrived diagonally from the windows and was dulled by the thin lace curtains.

But weakened though it was, the light shined on the row of bookcases by the wall and the large canopied bed on the west side.

On the bed were a woman and her great mass of hair that shined gold in the dull morning sun.

She was the Reine des Garous.

She lay face down in the soft bed with a smile on her face and damp, see-through sheets clinging to her body. Her body sank down on her legs which were spread to the left and right.

As she sank down into the shaking bed, she held her sweaty breasts between her arms.

“Hee hee. So we never did manage to finish our lessons. But there’s still time left, so how about we get something to eat?”

The Reine des Garous licked the sweat from her lips which were faintly decorated with lipstick.

Her smile deepened as she looked at the person she was leaning over.

“So how about we check to see how our precious, precious cooking turned out?”

She inhaled, stopped a few times midway, and used intermittent strength to lift her lower stomach.

“Ah, wait, hee!” said the person below her.



“Don’t worry. I’m sure it turned out well. Yes...today’s cooking method was ‘marinating’. The title is ‘A One-Night Soaking between You and Me’. Hee hee. It’s like we’re studying for a test. But, but. We did let it soak all night in a nice hoooot place. I can tell without looking that the marinade has thoroughly soaked the meat.”

She smiled a little but then spoke sharply without warning. She sat up and looked down at him from above.

“But you need to wait a while longer, okay?”

“Eh?”

“Oh, dear. Oh, dear. What is that look for? We of course need an *hors d’oeuvre* before the soup or *viande*.” She lowered her face to her partner’s. “But we need to prepare an *amuse gueule* even before that.”

More than a kiss, the Reine des Garous seemed to swallow her partner’s lips with her own. She forced his lips apart with her tongue, and...

“Nn.”

She scooped out the heated dampness inside to make it hers while allowing her own to flow down her tongue to offer it to him.

A few Catholic *signe cadre* opened next to her. They contained the emblem of the Three Musketeers, but she pushed them away with a finger. If she erased them, they would only reappear right next to her.

“Do this and they still provide a view from a distance.”

“Eh? ...Th-they can see us through those *signe cadre*?”

The Reine des Garou’s expression changed when she heard that. Her smile relaxed and her cheeks reddened.

“Turning up the heat in the middle of marinating? Isn’t that a little aggressive? W-wait a moment and I will add plenty of kindling, so stay perfectly still, okay? Moving would be dangerous. It’s the wife’s job to manage the fire, so I’ll do my best. I’ll do my very best!”

“Eh? Th-that isn’t what I meant.”

“Not to worry. I told them I would get back to them when we were done eating...2 weeks ago.”

So...

“With the *amuse-gueule* over, it’s time for the *hors d’oeuvre*.”

The Reine des Garous licked her partner.

She licked him everywhere her tongue could reach at the moment: his face, his neck, below his ears, along his hairline, and his hair itself.

“Um, your hands please...”

“R-right...”

He raised his hands, so she licked between his fingers, his elbow, his armpit, and as much of his back as she could reach while twisting his body.

“Ah, wait. Twist me like that and, um, it feels so much tighter and the ‘marinating’ is going to move to the next stage! The next stage!”

“Hee hee. That’s fine with me. Think of this as the final rubbing and keep fighting! Yes, first I’ll rub it from the right and then from the left. ...Oh, dear. Why are you crying? We’re only at the *hors d’oeuvre*.”

And...

“I’m sure I won’t be able to experience this time or this flavor for a while after this.”

“...Yeah.”

He breathed a heated sigh and obediently nodded, so she nodded deeply back. And...

“That way of nodding looked incredibly tasty. I just about skipped straight to the *viande* after the *hors d’oeuvre*.”

“Um, hasn’t this cooking lesson transformed into a mealtime manners lesson?”

“What were the proper manners again? Do you remember?”

“You’re supposed to hold the knife and fork with your index finger placed

gently on the back.”

“And weren’t there signals used to show you’re still eating or finished eating?”

“Testament. If you cross the knife and fork on your plate, it means you’re still eating. If you align them together on the right, it means you’re finished eating.”

“That’s right,” she said while wrapping her arms around him and crossing them on his back.

She also wrapped her legs around him and clutched at his lower hips with the back of her knees and her heels. But while she made sure she could still move her hips up and down...

“I’m supposed to place my index fingers on the back, right?”

She moved the index fingers of her crossed arms and traced them along his back.

He cried out and tried to arch his back, but he was pinned down by the legs and arms around him and she then took his lips too.

“I hold it down with the knife while I eat it, don’t I?”

She softly bit them and lightly sucked at them. After breathing in, she let go.

“Hee hee.”

She did it a few more times. After all...

“I’m going to be working on the front line for a while. And the clash between Hexagone Française and Hashiba is finally beginning.”

I need to devour him as much as I can today, thought the Reine des Garous.

After all, she would come down with withdrawal symptoms if she did not do so regularly.

And those withdrawal symptoms were quite serious:

...I feel an irresistible urge to see him.

She never noticed while seeing him every day and consuming him whenever

she felt like it, but she generally wanted to see him and be with him.

When she wanted to really feel like she was with him, she would consume him and sometimes even milk him dry. She felt like the latter had started happening more often once their daughter had left. *Is that because I don't have to hold back anymore or because I'm feeling stress from the loneliness of her absence? Either way, I need to handle this better.*

But if she went out to the front line, she would be unable to see him.

She had prepared 3 months' worth of his homemade jam sauce as a reducing agent, but she doubted that would last her more than a week.

In the past, she had brought along clothes smelling of him, but that was a bad idea. After being driven half mad by withdrawal symptoms, she had tried to force those clothes onto herself before going to sleep and they had torn. She also had a vague recollection of trying to cook and eat them after that, but she did not quite remember what happened there.

The worst time was when she had gone to the south to deter Hashiba after they had taken over K.P.A. Italia.

Her deterrence had simply been wandering around near the provisional border. She had been told she could use the occasional fallen tree she came across to throw into K.P.A. Italia, so – long story short – 5 of their guard stations had been destroyed by a physical attack that slipped right past their ether detection.

The problem had been when she had looked up at the sky during the moonlit night. She used a *signe cadre* to say good night to him when he would have been about to go to sleep. Then they had looked up into the night sky together and seen the two moons there.

She had suddenly remembered when they had confessed to each other long ago.

The withdrawal symptoms had rushed in at that moment.

She had been completely unable to contain herself, so she had obeyed her homing instinct and ran back home.

...I ran super fast.

She returned to find him asleep. In the bed, he had been holding a map, most likely to find the location of the front line his wife was on.

...I'm right here.

But she could not say that, so she had decided to simply gaze upon his sleeping face, calm her heart, and smell him.

But then he had grabbed her hand and gotten up.

"I could smell you were here."

He had continued without letting go of her hand.

"I was lonely."

She had nodded once, lifted him from the bed, pecked at him over and over while having a good cry, pushed him down onto the floor, and...

...I milked him dry, didn't I?

She recalled it happening 8 times faster than usual. And he had yelled "N-no! If we make this much noise, people will be able to hear us outside!", so she knew he must have been fired up too.

But she also felt that getting him to rub her head had meant a lot more than devouring him.

The next morning, she had returned to the front line in the blanket she always used with him.

"Huh? You're done already?" Mouri-03 had asked.

"Say that and I'll head back there every day."

In the end, the Student Council had been forced to make a ruling, but luckily...

"They aren't going to limit or criticize my daily interactions with you."

War was a wonderful thing. It expanded her lifestyle.

And she wanted to make full use of the advantages it brought her, so...

"Um, I am a country woman who was raised in the mountains, but there is one dining rule I know very well."

“What’s that?”

“Testament. In Hexagone Française, meat dishes always come with a sauce and you have to slather the sauce all over it before eating.”

The Reine des Garous kissed him and continued speaking without pulling back very far.

“I’ll come down with withdrawal symptoms if I don’t have the sauce you make for me.”

So...

“The marinating should be about done. I’ll remove the excess marinade and polish it up, so cross your knife and fork when the sauce is ready. And to get you there...”

She spread her knees and spread his legs between them.

She could not resist now. So after positioning him like that...

“Now, let’s prepare for the main dish. Let’s see how long you can remain calm at the end here. Oooone, twoooo, threeee. Oh, dear. You don’t have to cry. Or is that supposed to be the soup?”

The Reine des Garous laughed and sent her body crawling along his. And then a sudden thought came to her.

They were making up for a coming deficiency, but...

“I wonder if Nate will ever learn the joy and loneliness of devouring someone like this.”

“And so our victorious mood from Novgorod ends here. This information was just officially sent to Asama via IZUMO, but Hashiba’s forces have begun an all-out war with Hexagone Française’s Mouri forces.”

Masazumi spoke in her track suit and her words rang through the small room where Musashi’s main forces were gathered.

They were in the front academy building on Okutama, the rear central ship. This was the tatami-floored student council room in the center of the 3rd floor.

They still had to organize some of their things there, but it was a place for them all. And Masazumi said more there.

“I would now like to go over what information we have and then think about our next move. ...Got that?”

Chapter 2: Speaker in a Place of Ongoing Maintenance

CHAPTER 2

"Speaker in a Place of Ongoing Maintenance"



By the time I noticed
It had already started
At some point
Point Allocation (State of the World)

*By the time I noticed
It had already started
At some point*

Point Allocation (State of the World)

Hexagone Française's Mouri forces and Hashiba had finally engaged in battle.

The student council room was still being arranged and its maintenance as the Musashi Mk. 2 was underway. In there, Mitotsudaira turned to Asama, the source of the information, to confirm what Masazumi was saying.

When Asama noticed her gaze, she nodded back and Mitotsudaira sensed some concern in her gaze.

...Oh.

Only after wondering why that was did she remember that she was from Hexagone Française and she was the daughter of the Reine des Garous, their Vice Chancellor. However...

"Do not worry. I am my king's knight. My family is a different matter. Isn't that right?"

Asama's eyebrows rose slightly and she finally blushed.

"Eh? Oh, y-yes, that's right. Right? You're Toori-kun's knight, r-right? J-just like at Novgorod, right?"

...Are you still bothered by what happened this morning!?

Mitotsudaira also blushed for no real reason.

Behind them, Kimi's shoulders were shaking in suppressed laughter, but Mitotsudaira and Asama could still hear it. However, the nudist in a track suit jacket and Horizon were sitting out front and had not noticed.

So Mitotsudaira calmed her breathing and spoke.

"Masazumi."

They had to focus on strategy right now.

Mitotsudaira raised her right hand in her blue track suit and asked Masazumi a question.

“Masazumi, what situation brought those two nations to war?”

“Judge. Simply put, Hashiba has solidified their footing after conquering westward.”

Masazumi swung her right hand to open a sign frame along the path of the hand. The sign frame opened in a stacked document-checking mode, but she had Tsukinowa on her shoulder rotate it by 90 degrees and then enlarge it.

“You’ve gotten used to this,” commented Heidi.

“I have, haven’t I?”

Masazumi nodded in obvious satisfaction, but Noriki silently pointed at the sign frame while assembling a bookcase.

When she looked back, she found the sign frame was upside down.

...Oh, dear.

Mitotsudaira found it adorable and Masazumi sighed in obvious dissatisfaction.

“Oh, um, Tsukinowa, when rotating it, you can’t just rotate it. Everyone has to be able to read the-...oh, is that too confusing? Um, when it’s oriented sideways, this side goes down. Can you remember that? Then let’s try rotating it. Spin, spiiiiin. Judge. Then what about this side? Down? Down. Oh, good job, good job. I’ll have to give you a treat to reward you. Okay? Okay? Ah ha ha. Here you go.”

“Seijun, hey, hey, come on back now.”

Masazumi noticed the track suit jacket calling out to her, so she cleared her throat.

Then Horizon turned back toward Mitotsudaira.

“Masazumi-sama, I believe Mitotsudaira-sama asked a question.”

“Judge. And I’ll answer it.”

The sign frame displayed a simple map of Hexagone Française and M.H.R.R.

Mitotsudaira heard Masazumi speak while gesturing to the map.

“Listen. The two nations are currently facing each other across the provisional national border. And not near IZUMO on the northern border where we were. This is further south near the center.”

“From there, Hashiba will have to use the mountain pass and then invade to the northwest.”

Mitotsudaira had never been there, but she knew the general layout of the area.

So she knew what Hashiba had likely decided.

“If they passed through northern M.H.R.R., they would have to deal with the Protestant forces that hold the north. They also wouldn’t want to cause trouble around IZUMO. So if they pass through the central region...”

Mitotsudaira opened a sign frame of her own. Asama quickly synced hers with Masazumi’s.

...She really has this set up well.

The Asama Shrine must have been bringing them together using an information sharing system. Sensing the benefits of that, Mitotsudaira moved her finger along the map now displayed on her sign frame.

A red line was drawn along the path of her finger and it appeared on Masazumi’s sign frame as well. And it indicated...

“Most likely, Hashiba’s forces will head west for the mountain pass into central Hexagone Française while receiving support from K.P.A. Italia. After all, the mountains prevent Hexagone Française’s god of war unit from being deployed on any kind of large scale. And based on the Shirasagi Castle, Hashiba’s aerial ships likely have an excellent ability to cross mountainous terrain, so I think they will be able to move quickly.”

She hesitated with an “um”, but then she drew a circle somewhat southwest of the mountains in central Hexagone Française.

“Hashiba’s forces will either temporarily land or descend around here to

release their ground troops. And after continuing northwest, they will leave the mountains and enter a valley corridor.”

“Do they really need to bother releasing ground troops?”

Heidi’s question received a response from Neshinbara who was assembling the bookcase with Noriki. He quickly spun around, overshot his mark, and turned back the other way a bit while striking a pose with a hand on his glasses.

“They very much do need to. After all, Hexagone Française has gods of war. A slow aerial ship would be a sitting duck to the cannons or arbalests carried by gods of war. Even if a full unit of gods of war cannot enter the mountains, there is god of war equipment for invading mountainous regions and a full unit is not needed for sniper attacks. If Hashiba is concerned about such guerilla warfare tactics against aerial ships, they will be much safer lowering infantry from their aerial ships before arriving at any critical points.”

And...

“Even the mountains have interception and defense barriers set up at the critical points. It’s hard to tell while on the Musashi, but the nations on the surface are replete with anti-air equipment. And the latest trend is to make them unmanned and automated, so they will need to eliminate those before advancing whenever they run across them. Any questions?”

After the half-nudist gave everyone a look, Mitotsudaira exchanged a glance with everyone. And then she spoke to Neshinbara.

“If there’s something you want to say, you can say it.”

“Wh-why does it sound like there’s an implied ‘not that we’ll listen’ on the end of that!?”

“Well, um,” stalled the others as Mitotsudaira suddenly remembered her mother and father.

Her mother was Hexagone Française’s Vice Chancellor with a Far Eastern inherited name. She would have to take part in this battle.

...I’m really worried...

That thought had more to it:

...About my father.

“Okay, honey. I’m about ready for seconds of the meat dish. Hee hee. What are you talking about? I’ve been keeping it warm for you, haven’t I? ...Eh? French cooking doesn’t allow for seconds like that? I see... But not to worry! I have a Far Eastern inherited name, so I must do my best and have seconds! Yes, then let’s work together to prepare it. Yes, that’s right. I’ll keep shouting ‘another serving!’ until you can’t move for the next 3 days. Eh? That wasn’t what you meant? Then what did you mean? Oh, I carelessly put the heat on too high and it’s about to boil over? Don’t worry, don’t worry. Breathe in and breathe out. There, you’ve calmed down now, haven’t you? Then, hee hee, teach me all about it. But...this sounds like a lot of trouble, so let’s change it to all-you-can-eat rules.”

“Is something the matter, Mitotsudaira-sama? You look pale.”

“No, um...let’s just say I’m worried about my family in a broad sense.”

Horizon nodded at Mitostudaira’s response.

“So you are worried about your mother?”

She saw Mitotsudaira start to nod but then shake her head.

“Oh, judge. I am worried about my mother in the broader sense I mentioned, but if anyone, it’s my father I am really worried about...”

“Whatever the case, it is a-parent you are worried about your parents.”

Horizon tried to respond to Masazumi. She had to say something. The heart of her tsukkomis was their immediate delivery. But Asama placed a hand on her shoulder from behind to stop her.

“Y-you can’t, Horizon! That only did light damage! We can handle it!”

“Ahh, I can’t handle iiiit. I can’t handle it at alllll.”

“This is no laughing matter, Kimi! And Horizon, you need to resist!”

“No, do not stop me, Asama-sama.”

“Ha ha ha. Look at that, Tsukinowa. Horizon liked my pun.”

“Face reality!” everyone shouted.

Masazumi tilted her head at that, but Horizon turned back toward Mitotsudaira with an air of “anyway”.

“To get back on topic, it would seem Mitotsudaira-sama has a bad feeling about the father she so takes after.”

She placed a hand on Mitotsudaira’s shoulder.

“When your father’s frail and flat-chested heroine nature lands him in trouble, your mother, the Loup Garou queen, will make a heroic appearance, hide him somewhere safe, and protect him. And then your father will weep as he thanks her. Isn’t that right?’

“In a broad sense, I feel like all of that is entirely accurate.”

This sounded like a family issue, so Horizon decided not to dig any deeper and instead turned to Asama next to Mitotsudaira.

“Asama-sama, have you received any information from IZUMO that could be of use to Masazumi-sama?”

“N-no, IZUMO seems to be taking a policy of noninterference on this one. Same with Shirasago. And as for the Mouri clan...” Asama’s eyebrows grew flat. “They apparently intend to avoid using any Shinto forces in the interception of Hashiba.”

“In other words, Mouri will not be using any long-range cannons like you. ... That must take incredible restraint.”

“Huh, huh? I feel like you have a weirdly distorted view of Shinto,” said Asama. “Oh, and they have no choice but to use the Shinto divine transmission infrastructure, but they apparently intend to avoid using Far Eastern students for their fighting force.”

“Wait,” said Urquiaga as he stuck his head in through a window. “Mouri is preserving their Far Eastern forces? ...Isn’t that backwards?”

“That’s right,” responded Mitotsudaira.

Horizon raised her head to hear what they had to say. She saw Neshinbara standing up, straightening his collar, and clearing his throat, so...

“Please tell us, Adele-sama.”

“Ehhhhh!? Me! You’d normally ask me, right!? Do you hate me, Ariadust-kun!? W-wait! If you direct that much negative emotion my way, I-I’ll...!”

“I think you can ignore him, Horizon.”

“That’s right. Yes.”

“Heh heh. Pay him no heed. Now, can you answer that question, Adele!?”

With Asama, Mitotsudaira, and Kimi supporting her, Horizon knew she had made the right decision. They all looked over to Adele who responded while nervously munching on her breakfast of bread crust in a bag.

“U-um...”

“Do you need something like butter, Adele-sama?”

“Ah! Y-you’ll give me some!? I’ll take it! I’ll take it!”

“Judge. Then...here is ‘something like butter’.”

“You make it sound like a small difference, but this is completely different! ... Wow, it smells like butter, but it’s super hard!”

Adele sighed and then answered.

“Anyway, Hexagone Française and Mouri probably see Hashiba’s invasion as the greatest threat.”

Horizon listened to Adele’s words and passed the girl something like jam in a bamboo grass wrapper.

“Here. Now continue. That was a bribe.”

“I’m grateful but also not grateful. ...Well, I guess I’ll continue.”

Adele brought her knees together as she sat on the tatami mat floor.

“Hexagone Française has more of a national fighting force than Mouri does since Mouri is treated like a portion of Hexagone Française. So the reason they

would use Hexagone Française against Hashiba and preserve Mouri is...”

“Because the nudist sun king really cares about his wife.”

“Wow,” said Asama, Mitotsudaira, and Naito as they leaned back a little.

But Adele groaned in thought and then continued.

“I think it’s most likely because Hexagone Française is preserving Mouri in preparation for later.”

Neshinbara used both hands to wildly gesture toward himself, but Noriki handed him some glue. They were apparently starting to attach the shelves to the bookcase.

And Adele glanced over at Masazumi.

Masazumi nodded and checked her sign frame’s settings.

“Asama, can you sync this with Adele’s?”

“Yes. ...And done.”

Adele nodded toward Asama and reached for her own Catholic sign frame. Since they were synced, Adele’s list of sites for mail-ordering snacks appeared on the left of Masazumi’s large sign frame, but Adele did not hesitate to start staring at it.

“Um, this is the place.”

It displayed the Kinki region to the northeast of Osaka.

“The Battle of Sekigahara will be fought here later. That decisive battle determines Matsudaira’s rule. But while Mouri Terumoto is chosen as the general of the anti-Matsudaira western army, she isn’t actually able to mobilize the Mouri forces. ...There will be plenty of interpretations, but Matsudaira wins in the end.”

Horizon passed Adele something like marmalade and whispered into her ear.

“This is a tip. Now, please work just a little more.”

“What kind of character am I in your mind, Vicereine Horizon?”

But Adele took a breath and drew a circle on Sekigahara. She wrote the

character for “hair” inside it as the first character of Mouri.

“Circle Hair!” exclaimed the idiot.

Naruze hit his face with a 10 yen coin and somewhat raised her eyebrows while glaring at him.

“You are the worst.”

“W-wait a second! In your case, it would be Black Circle Hair, wouldn’t it!?”

Naito hit the idiot’s face with a 10 yen coin while smiling at him.

“You are the worst.”

“W-wait! In your case, it would be Gold Circle Hair!”

They both hit him with a 10 yen coin and he rolled backwards.

...This is not good...

I need to pass this off to someone else, thought Horizon. But who? As her gaze swept across the room, everyone ducked out of the way. Everyone except Asama, that is. So...

“Shrine Maiden Circle Hair.”

“L-let’s calm down, Horizon! It’s starting to sound like we’re just saying whatever weird thing we want! And the rules say you can’t bring our jobs into this!”

“Understood. Then...Asama Circle Hair.”

“That’s even worse!”

“Heh heh heh. That’s dangerous! That’s real dangerous, Horizon!”

Kimi was a musician of an entertainer god, so if she liked it, Horizon was satisfied.

“Um, may I continue?” asked Adele.

“Yes, you may.”

She nodded, drew a circle on Europe, and then wrote a 6 for Hexagone Française.

She then waited for about 5 seconds.

“No reaction? Are you all okay?”

“Judge. We are just fine. ...But the self-styled entertainer couldn’t do anything with that? I suppose that is why you are only ‘self-styled’.”

“D-dammit! I had something in mind! I swear I did!”

“Yes, yes. Judge, judge.”

Mitotsudaira intervened to calm the two and Adele nodded.

“Umm, Hexagone Française gains two things by sending their French forces out front to fight Hashiba. The first is that they preserve their Mouri forces for negotiations around Sekigahara.”

“Negotiations?”

“Judge. In other words, *whether or not* the Mouri forces will take part in the history recreation of Sekigahara. If they’re powerful enough, not taking part will leave their opponent greatly indebted to them. And if they do take part, they can actually hold their own against the ultimate victors. They could even win and deal with it using interpretations.”

Also...

“The second is to leave Hashiba indebted to them. By preserving their Mouri forces and intentionally ‘losing’, Hashiba will be indebted to them. And to get back to what I mentioned in the first reason, they can also give Hashiba the hope that Mouri’s preserved forces might take part in Sekigahara as part of the Hashiba forces. So...”

Horizon nodded.

“Are you saying that Mouri holds the casting vote for Sekigahara?”

“Judge,” confirmed Adele.

The idiot raised his hand and tilted his head.

“Ca-ca-cas? Um...”

“I was trying to call you a crass fool but misspoke.”

“Oh, is that all? ...Wait, no! And why are you taking the boke role, Horizon!? That’s my job, ain’t it!? Ain’t it!?”

“Toori-sama, your bokes have grown stale lately.”

“That was harsh...” commented the others, so she decided to keep their opinion in mind. But...

“They hold the casting vote. ...That means they have the ‘numbers’ needed to determine which side wins. Use that term and you too can sound smart, so make sure to remember it.”

Masazumi watched as the idiot said, “I see.”

...Is he starting to gain some interest in politics?

Lately, Aoi seemed to be leaving everything to the others while still getting as much information as he could.

At the moment, he was staring at Adele’s snack list on the sign frame. And...

“Adele, if you want macarons, why not get them from K.P.A. Italia?”

“Well, ever since Hashiba took over there, the distribution has been more focused on P.A. Oda.”

“There’s no helping that.” Aoi smiled and looked at the scrolling list some more. “I feel like there’s a lot of overlap with our porn game lists...”

Me: “Hey, Tenzou. Isn’t that right?”

10ZO: “Wh-what are you talking about!? I have very specific tastes, so I don’t have a long list like that!”

Scarred: “Master Tenzou, sorry about the wait. My shift is over. The chief priest gave me a sake manju, so how about we eat it together while we head to the academy?”

10ZO: “Oh, that sounds wonderful. But I only see one of them...”

Naruze started whispering when she heard that.

“Asama’s dad does some good work.”

“Yeah, Ga-chan, let’s record this.”

Scarred: “Master Tenzou, that just means we each take half. Just like with Excalibur.”

10ZO: “Judge. Okay, Mary-dono, give me your hand. We are in a bit of a hurry.”

Scarred: “Judge. ...Hee hee. With both hands full, we couldn’t fight back if we were attacked now.”

“Hell yes.”

“Hell yes.”

The black and gold pair exchanged a high five, but the merchant girl complained.

“Oh, crap! I failed to predict this one and didn’t record it! Will someone sell it to me!?”

“Sure, sure.”

The fact that Naito would sell it was the most frightening part. *I hope all our information is safe*, thought Masazumi, but she had to trust that nothing of critical importance would get out.

But...

“To sum up everything Adele said... Mouri is already thinking about what happens after they lose to Hashiba.”

“I see,” said Horizon with a nod.

She eventually placed a hand on the nudist’s shoulder next to her.

“Toori-sama, it would seem Hexagone Française’s nudist would prefer to deal with Hashiba-sama than with you. How does it feel to strip as much as humanly possible and still get rebuffed? You stripped for nothing.”

“Dammit. I’m definitely sending him a complaint divine mail sometime! I’ll piss him off by attaching a doctored photo of him wearing clothes!”

“Oh?” said Mitotsudaira.

When everyone turned toward her, she blushed a little, looked to Horizon, and then to the idiot next to her.

“Um...Chancellor? You exchanged divine mail addresses with the Roi-Soleil? I didn't think you had enough time for that during Magdeburg.”

“Yeah, but our ‘We're the Student Counciliiiiiiiiiiii!’ linked to the site he runs the week before last. The introductory text for the link called him a ‘nudist in appearance only’, so he sent me a complaint divine mail. Where he found my address, I don't know.”

The half-nudist opened a sign frame showing Louis Exiv's message with the ‘personally written’ mark next to it.

It said, “Would you like to be my friend?”

“Toori-sama, he has already outdone you in tolerance.”

“Really, that Roi-Soleil seems somewhat eccentric to me,” said Mitotsudaira.

“If you ask me, we might be in trouble if Toori-kun makes too many friends of that sort,” said Asama. “Something would be seriously wrong if the future rulers of the Far East and Europe were both nudists.”

“Whose side are you on!?” he shouted.

“And don't do any diplomacy on your own, Aoi.”

Establishing friendly relations was a good thing, but the world could be a difficult place. At any rate...

“Judge. Listen, Aoi, if you're going to write a complaint message, I suggest getting your mother to look at it first. I bet she can locate any a-parent problems with it....Why are you all so tense? You need to laugh.”

“Now she's demanding we find it funny!?”

...Huh? But that's the second time I used that one. Isn't that how a running gag works?

Maybe I have to use it even more first, decided Masazumi.

Urquiaga nodded from the window and then flew off. Narumi's work shift had likely ended. Asama could be seen signing the notification.

But as he left, Urquiaga asked a question.

“Then what do we do? We are friends with Hexagone Française. We could always hold P.A. Oda in check from the east and prevent them from going all out against Mouri.”

“That’s right,” agreed Masazumi. “And that brings us to our main topic: what we should do now.”

She could see everyone perk up at that. She could tell that Urquiaga, Tenzou, and Mary were listening over the divine transmission. Yoshiyasu and the others working with the 2nd years were as well. So...

“First, we need to seize Kantou, which includes taking back Edo, and we need to move things along toward Nobunaga’s assassination. So the very first thing we must do...is defeat Houjou.”

Chapter 3: Observers in a Place of Foresight

CHAPTER 3

"Observers in a Place of Foresight"



Let's watch the beginning
Of the beginning
Of the beginning
Point Allocation (Surpass Yourself)

Let's watch the beginning

Of the beginning

Of the beginning

Point Allocation (Surpass Yourselfs)

“Hey, ‘Musashi’-san? Their Tottori Castle is arriving in Edo via Lake Biwa, right? That can’t be fun for Houjou. And Mouri and Hashiba are clashing sometime today. ...The times are really on the move.”

On the bow of Musashino, Sakai sat on a bench, viewed a map, and spoke to “Musashi” as she offered him a teacup. He then looked to the documents and envelope on the side table.

“The dragon races are apparently having a meeting in the mountains, so I bet all this trouble is just going to keep going.”

“Judge. Masazumi-sama and the others are currently holding a meeting in the Student Council Room to discuss the Mouri vs. Hashiba issue. We are currently analyzing the relevant movements of the other nations and sending them the results. Over.”

“You sure are active, ‘Musashi’-san.”

“Just the other day, I made my magnificent debut as the Musashi Mk. 2 and reset my age to 0. I thought I should also reset how hard I work. Over.”

“Does that reset also bring “Ariake” and Tamako back to 0?”

“No, only the Musashi had the ‘Mk. 2’ added in the registration, so I have determined that only I return to age 0. Over.”

Ariake: “ ‘Musashi’-sama... Over.”

Okutama: “Sakai-sama, please avoid saying anything that will provoke her. I beg you. Over.”

“Judge, judge.” Sakai smiled bitterly. “What do you think will happen in the war between Mouri and Hashiba?”

“We need not speculate when the first battle should begin soon. It would be

faster to simply watch. Over.”

“No, it’s fun to make predictions. So who do you think will win?”

“Due to the history recreation rules and Hashiba’s control of the Testament Union, Hashiba will surely win. Over.”

“I thought you’d think that.”

Sakai sighed and “Musashi” noticed the teacup still on the tray she held.

“Sakai-sama, please have your post-meal tea. Over.”

“Oh, right. I’ll take it, I’ll take it.”

“You only need to say it once. Or do you want me to serve you 2 cups? Over.”

“I always drink 3 cups total.”

“Making sure the water does not cool is not easy. And more importantly,” “Musashi” stood next to Sakai. “Do you have some kind of doubt concerning Hashiba’s victory? Over.”

“Oh, well, I’m not sure if ‘doubt’ is the word I would use. And I think you know what I’m talking about.”

“I cannot know unless you tell me. Over.”

“That’s right.” Sakai got up from the bench and rolled up the map he had been looking at. “When I was in high school, I went at it with K.P.A. Italia, but... but on the inside, there was a sense of ‘We’re Matsudaira’.”

“So you were borrowing the authority of that name? Over.”

“Well, Ii, Sakakibara, and the others used it pretty well in negotiations, but that actually tended to restrict us. We had to strike a kind of balance.”

However...

“Back then, talk of Hashiba and Nobunaga honestly didn’t really seem real. I mean, as a national power, we were the Matsudaira that would govern the Far East in the end.”

“Are you saying Hashiba’s victory is meaningless? Over.”

“No, not meaningless. It’s going to set a lot in motion, after all. And to be

honest, I'm more worried about Mouri right now. ...Are you listening, 'Musashi'-san?"

"I am. So tell me why you are worried about Mouri even though they will be defeated here. Over."

"Judge. Well you see, Mouri won't be totally destroyed even after losing to Hashiba. They keep going. So I'm curious how they view this battle with Hashiba. Tres España was the same when they fought Toori and the others, right? They were thinking beyond their loss and they took various measures against it."

"Are you saying Mouri will do the same? Over."

"I'm not sure. We got through everything by looking only to the future, but these people should be looking at the present and then looking to the future."

Sakai looked up at the Ariake's ceiling and then forward, to the south.

"Now, if the Tottori Castle is coming, then the already-prepared Azuchi Castle will move out. ...And it isn't just Hexagone Française that will respond to that. Date, Mogami, Sanada, Houjou, and all the others are going to move. So I wonder..."

"Wonder about what? Over."

Sakai nodded, took a sip of the tea, and took a breath.

"Just like us, Toori, Masazumi-kun, and the others have at least partially made it this far due to the bright future ahead of us, but they're going to have to continue forward while accepting the feelings of those who are heading toward the past instead."

He laughed and raised his eyebrows a little.

"So they're holding a meeting in the Student Council Room, are they? I hope everything they see there is both meaningful for the future and enjoyable."

In the Student Council Room, Masazumi opened a sign frame displaying a map of southern Kantou.

“Our first objective is defeating Houjou.”

Hashiba-controlled Edo Bay was on the southwest, Houjou was west of that, and both Sanada and P.A. Oda’s Takigawa Ichimasu were located above that.

The Musashi was at Mito, northeast of Edo, which placed Takigawa west of them.

There are enemies everywhere, thought Masazumi.

“As I already said, Houjou is key to the post-Nobunaga period in Kantou. As you can see on this map, Houjou has been placed under Takigawa Ichimasu’s control. But Takigawa Ichimasu makes a mistake after Nobunaga’s assassination. That being...”

“The Battle of Kanagawa.”

The answer was given by Noriki who was assembling the bookcase in the entrance space. He kept his back to her as he continued.

“When Takigawa receives word of Nobunaga’s assassination, she is slow to confirm its veracity and, in her hesitation, she is caught by surprise in an attack by Houjou. She would have had the advantage, but as a non-local, no one else wants to help her and she is forced to retreat.”

“Oh? So what happens to Houjou after that?”

Noriki sighed at the idiot’s question.

“Ask Honda.”

Futayo immediately turned toward Masazumi. *I guess that means me*, thought Masazumi with a mental sigh.

...But, well...

It was surprising for Noriki to talk about Houjou like this.

Gold Mar: “I’m shocked to hear you talk on and on like that.”

Laborer: “Wait. What kind of person do you think I am?”

Mal-Ga: “Oh, shut up. Now I have to redraw my storyboard...”

Laborer: “Again, wait. What are you talking about?”

I get the feeling learning that would keep him from ever opening his mouth again, thought Masazumi. But I guess this kind of exchange is part of our academy's character. I also feel like these breaks take the spotlight and end up determining everything.

But he named me, so I guess I'll have to do it.

"Okay, I'll go over the Houjou battles we're involved in, starting with Kanagawa."

Masazumi raised 3 fingers.

"The first, as Noriki said, is the Battle of Kanagawa. Starting this will mean Nobunaga's assassination is supposed to have already happened, so it will be the most important at the moment. But..."

"Excuse me. ...We are not involved in that battle, are we?"

Crossunite spoke up as he and Mary walked in, so Masazumi nodded.

"That's the problem. The Battle of Kanagawa is the Kantou event that will start advancing things toward Nobunaga's assassination, but we can't take part. We have to have Houjou start it. But P.A. Oda has arranged themselves in a troublesome way. Hashiba left the Azuchi Castle at Edo for the Bunroku Campaign and Takigawa brought in the troublesome Shirasagi Castle. So if Houjou begins the Battle of Kanagawa without P.A. Oda's permission, they're in a position to make a swift attack."

"So they'll have to be trickier about it, Musashi Vice President. ...But can they really do that at the moment?"

The Satomi President gave Masazumi a sharp look while crossing her arms by the wall.

The light in her eyes likely meant a variety of things, but Musashi had taken her in.

"We'll do something about that. We can't interact with Houjou at the moment due to Takigawa's control of the area, but an opportunity should present itself once Mouri begins their fighting with Hashiba. The Azuchi Castle

will be sent there for support, after all. Once that happens, Houjou will have some room for action.”

The Satomi President did not nod, but...

“I’ll trust that you’re at least giving it some thought.”

As she said that, the idiot walked up next to her, took the same pose as her, and...

“I’ll trust that you’re at least giving it some thought.”

“D-damn you!”

“Toori-kun, Yoshie-chan is being serious, so please don’t tease her.”

“That’s right, Toori-sama. What if our precious Satomi girl is infected by your Toori germs?”

“D-dammit! Now you’re treating me like a pathogen!?”

Is that anything new? wondered Masazumi before clearing her throat and tapping the sign frame.

“To continue: Listen. Once the Battle of Kanagawa is over, it’s our turn. Matsudaira and Houjou use the confusion after Nobunaga’s death to fight over Kantou’s land. That is known as the Tensho Jingo Conflict and it almost fully draws out the map of Kantou. And after finding peace, Houjou and Matsudaira form an alliance.”

“Then we’ve gotta do that.”

It was frightening how readily the idiot said that. Mitotsudaira glanced over at Masazumi who waved a hand dismissively.

...Besides, it is true we have to do that.

But, thought Masazumi. *That alliance is immediately followed by a turning point.*

“There is a problem. ...After they ally themselves with Matsudaira, Houjou has some trouble with those under its command.”

“Huh? You mean like doing the top knot on one of their bigwigs but from the front?”

“You go die. And I’m shocked to learn you thought you were being considerate by doing it from behind. But that’s not it. Are you listening?”

The others began making concerned comments about how well she was dealing with him, but she was not sure why they would think that.

But there was something she had to say.

“Do you remember the Kantou War Ban? No, not you, idiot. Don’t force yourself. And stop jumping around. ...That’s the law issued by Hashiba banning any war in Kantou. Responsibility for breaking that is placed on Houjou, so they are attacked by Hashiba. That’s the Siege of Odawara. And...”

And...

“For the Siege of Odawara, Matsudaira joins Hashiba’s forces.”

Mitotsudaira heard a quiet sigh from Yoshiyasu. But...

...Noriki isn’t slowing down on that bookcase at all.

Of course, the Siege of Odawara was in the Testament descriptions.

Yoshiyasu’s sigh was likely due to the disappointment of seeing a future that was fixated on ending the Satomi and Houjou conflict via Houjou’s destruction by Hashiba.

And Noriki’s lack of reaction was perhaps because he had already accepted that this was coming.

Mitotsudaira watched as Masazumi listed up the Houjou-related battles.

“So it looks like this.”

1: Battle of Kanagawa

- **Immediately after Nobunaga’s assassination. Hesitant Takigawa receives a surprise attack from Houjou and must retreat from Kantou.**



2: Tensho Jingo Conflict

- Immediately after The Battle of Kanagawa. Matsudaira and Houjou fight over Kantou's land. After making peace, they form an alliance.



3: Siege of Odawara

- As punishment for ignoring the Kantou War Ban, Houjou is attacked by Hashiba and they surrender.

"We can actively take part in #2 and #3. #2 in particular is all about us. But..."

Mitotsudaira continued for her while aware of the tension in her brow.

"The problem is how to get Houjou to start #1, the Battle of Kanagawa."

"It's pathetic," said Yoshiyasu. She leaned against the wall and did not even look Mitotsudaira's way. "According to the Testament, Satomi had already declined by this point and was effectively dependent on Houjou. ...And yet here we have Houjou too afraid of Hashiba to act."

...Yoshiyasu...

Mitotsudaira understood her irritation.

"Yoshiyasu, you view Houjou as your rival, don't you?"

"What!? No! Stop making up things about me, Mito Lord!"

Mal-Ga: "I'll put that in my storyboard... I need to at least end it on a happy note."

Righteousness: "Wait! Don't draw something that's only happy at the end! And don't just turn me into a good person!"

Obscene: "Ha ha ha. As a politician, shouldn't you want that!?"

Sticky King: "Indeed. It would be good for you to be a good person, Yoshly!!"

After watching Yoshiyasu fall to her knees by the wall, Mitotsudaira started to think she should not have said that. And...

...Oh?

She realized the Chancellor was looking at Noriki.

She followed his gaze to find that exchange had put a slight smile on the laborer's face.

She did not know why. It was hard to know other people's emotions or what made them laugh. If that was possible, Masazumi's jokes would not bomb so badly. But for now, Mitotsudaira thought it was a good thing that her classmate from Houjou was accepting of this situation.

And there was one thing that mattered more than any other now.

...How will we establish our relationship with Houjou?

"We can't communicate with Houjou due to Takigawa's surveillance, but we need to get Houjou to drive off Takigawa... Isn't this an impossible spiral?"

"You would think so, wouldn't you? But that's why-..."

"Heh heh. It could even happen tonight. You're going to use something as bait to send the Azuchi to Mouri. But flat politician and flat knight? Isn't there something you're a little worried about?" Kimi spread her mouth horizontally in a smile. "You know what's supposed to happen later today, don't you? It's very important."

"Judge," replied the 1st Special Duty Officer. He turned back toward Mary next to him. "The coming clash between Mouri and Hashiba is important, isn't it?"

"Hm? ...Master Tenzou, what do you mean it is important?"

"Judge. To support Hashiba in their *upcoming* battle against Mouri, the Azuchi Castle will move to the Mouri region. ...Mary-dono, you know what that means, don't you?"

"Oh," said Mary with a nod.

Mitotsudaira also realized what Kimi had meant, but she let Mary answer.

"If Lady Hashiba wins easily, she will not need the Azuchi's support, right?"

"That's right, Mary, Crossunite. So our future hangs in the balance of the upcoming battle between Mouri and Hashiba."

That was when a divine transmission arrived. It was voice only and from

Ookubo.

“Vice President! It’s urgent! ...Hexagone Française and Hashiba have engaged in battle!”

...Speak of the devil!

The image sent to everyone’s sign frames was a map of Hexagone Française.

Next to Muneshige, Gin commented on the location Ookubo had marked.

“That is almost exactly where the Mito Lord predicted. Well done.”

Hearing that, Horizon gave Mitotsudaira a thumbs up.

She of course nodded and gave a thumbs up back. Then icons representing each army appeared on the map along with their numbers.

“Hashiba has 32 thousand on the front line. Hexagone Française has 24 thousand including a god of war unit! ...It’s a land battle on a wide plain just past the mountain pass!”

“Hey, Henri.”

A man in a red vested summer uniform spoke below the morning sun and pale blue sky.

He stood on a green grassy plain in an Hexagone Française summer uniform. He was well built with a tall stature and he spoke to the woman in a girl’s uniform standing on his right.

“Hey, Henri. What do you think about this battlefield?”

“There’s nothing to think, Armand. We only have to follow the Princess’s instructions.”

Her crossed arms had somewhat pale flesh and black lines running along the joints.

She was an automaton with a partially-lifelike body. The man next to her was the same.

“You really do love the Princess.”

“Oh, you understand the emotion of love now, do you? I guess you’re even more human than me.”

“Yes.” The man named Armand nodded instead of mocking her and he continued calmly. “Once we have lived long enough, we do find areas we statistically prioritize more than others. Isn’t that right, Henri?”

“Is that what you call ‘love’?”

“Testament. I can determine that’s probably what it is, but it’s a bit of a problem.”

“Why?”

“Well,” replied Armand. “I am one of the managers of the maid automaton unit, so I naturally end up spending a lot of time with them. That means I automatically qualify as loving maids.”

“I see. ...And I spend every day – even while asleep – breathing the air, so that would mean I love air.”

“That’s right.”

“That’s completely wrong. Are you stupid, Armand? Think about it logically.”

Next to Henri, Armand looked up into the sky.

It was a blue but pale sky. It was a summer sky. And as he looked at it, he finally spoke.

“Testament. So that’s it! Once I thought about it logically, it all started making sense!”

“So you understand, Armand?”

“Yes.” He nodded and smiled toward Henri. “What I love most is air, isn’t it!?”

“No, you fool!”

As soon as Henri shouted back at him, their location was blown to pieces over a wide area.

The blast of shell collisions reached them from the direction of the rising sun.

They had been fired on from the east.

Chapter 4: Foreseers of the East and West

CHAPTER 4

"Foreseers of the East and West"



If a new battlefield is a container
What is poured into it?

Point Allocation (Tactics)

If a new battlefield is a container

What is poured into it?

Point Allocation (Tactics)

“Did the first shot hit!?”

With the setting sun and eastern sky behind her, a tall girl in an *eboshi*-style M.H.R.R. hat shouted a question.

The girl on the green grassy plain wore a heavily-armored version of a blue-dyed M.H.R.R. girls summer uniform. She was Katou Kiyomasa. She waved her hand so the fleet of 8 ironclad ships that could see her from the sky.

“Use that as the basis and focus your fire on the enemy’s front line!”

Kiyomasa could see a shadowy wall far ahead of her.

It was the enemy troops.

The wide-open field had nothing to block her vision, so all she saw were the distant mountains and the enemy.

“Begin engaging the Hexagone Française and Mouri forces in battle!”

Kiyomasa’s voice was answered by shells flying forward in the sky.

The 8 forward-facing ships each had 2 main cannons on the bow for a total of 16 shots. They stopped as if to breathe, but just as the shells were about to hit...

“Kiyomasa-sama! Each ship has now adjusted its aim! They will fix their spatial position in reference to their bow and begin firing!”

“Testament. Everyone...!”

Kiyomasa now looked behind her.

There was a great mass there.

It was not a wall. Partially due to how close it was, it looked thick and seemed to extend forever.

“M.H.R.R. Mobile Shell Unit and P.A. Oda Wind God Unit. All 32 thousand of you prepare to charge!”

She breathed in.

“Our enemy is Hexagone Française and Mouri’s main forces: their heavy god of war border defense knights and their Three Musketeers automaton unit! If we can secure this corridor, we will have secured the majority of the way to Paris. Thus...”

Kiyomasa drew the two scythe-spears from her back. She grasped each one in a hand and held them forward.

“Charge...!!”

“Testament...!!”

With Kiyomasa in the lead, the entirety of M.H.R.R.’s warriors shook the air with a roaring cry.

16 streams of rapid-fire shellfire began in the sky.

The ground troops first crouched low.

“Blitz...!!”

And then they charged toward the enemy formation with their weapons at the ready.

But their charge was not made by running across the plain’s grass. The M.H.R.R. students glided at low altitude using the Holy Spell-controlled flight devices installed in the shoulders or back of their mobile shells. The P.A. Oda students let the charm cloths wrapped around their legs sweep behind them like banners to create panels of wind, which...

“———!”

...sent them gliding along the grassy plain in a surfing pose.

While passing above the grass, the mobile shells scattered light from their Holy Spell charms and zigzagged as individual platoons.

While blowing the grass below them, the charm cloths trailed the glowing wind of Unique Spells while surfing as individual platoons.

Moment by moment, they gained more ground and quickly filled 1/4 of the

distance between east and west. And as they travelled west, they were supported from the east.

There was an easterly morning wind.

But it was not the chilly wind of early morning. It was the final easterly wind of the time just before the change from morning to day.

That wind headed west with the heat of the approaching midday.

The wind pushed the troops from the east.

The mobile shells floated up ever so slightly and gently accelerated.

The charm cloths rode the wave of the wind and accumulated speed.

Both groups rapidly flew westward.

The easterly wind blew and roared as it carried the troops with it.

The cannon fire in the sky passed over their heads as it shot westward.

They could no longer see the Hexagone Française front line that had been waiting on the grassy plain to the west.

The shock of the shells hitting had blasted the ground into the air, stirring up plenty of dust.

The green grass and dark damp dirt scattered in tiny pieces and created a wall passing north to south on the west side of the battlefield. But more shellfire arrived from the east as if to increase the thickness of that wall.

The shells smashed everything in their way.

And as the wind flew in from the east...

“Ohh...!” shouted Kiyomasa as she used the acceleration of both Caledfwlchs.
“Everyone...prepare your defenses!”

There was still a large gap between the two sides. They were only now reaching the halfway point of the grassy plain.

Their side’s cannon fire had not stopped.

But she still shouted for defenses and ducked low.

“The enemy is unharmed!”

Before the further shellfire could arrive, the black and green cloud obscuring the west was blown away from what lay beyond it.

And the rising wind and dirt revealed...

“Hexagone Française’s musketeers and gods of war... All 24 thousand of them are counterattacking!”

Henri saw them on the grassy plain.

On both of their flanks, 30 gods of war were lined up at 50 meter intervals.

They were brand new but mid-sized. And...

“From the looks of them, I can determine they are quite heavy.”

Their legs were thick and their heels extended straight back along the ground as far as they were tall. The bodies supported by those legs had a streamlined design that extended forward and the arms had launching spikes attached instead of hands.

The arm spikes had been fired vertically into the ground.

And the shoulders supporting the arms were also bizarrely shaped. Instead of a humanoid shape, they formed long launchers extending to the front and back. And they contained...

“Holy Spell defense barriers. And anti-warship ones at that.”

The countless shards of light scattering through the air were proof that those barriers were continuing to receive impacts from the eastern sky.

Henri and the others were on the west end of the grassy plain.

The grass had already become a pile of disturbed gravel and the grass floated above that.

But the shellfire from P.A. Oda did not break through the defense barriers held toward the sky by the gods of war.

These were middle gods of war built for defense.

They had protected the Hexagone Française forces from everything after the

enemy's initial shells.

Strategically, they should have been out front, but this was different.

That was because their strategy was different from normal.

...And it's thanks to them.

These middle gods of war were in the "heavy" class when it came to their weight and Henri knew they had been designed to create a new form of war for Hexagone Française.

"Let's see that then."

Once she said that, she saw movement.

As the middle gods of war continued to endure the shellfire, they pulled their arm spikes from the ground and leaned their bodies forward.

They were not lying down.

As their bodies moved forward, the long heels digging into the ground stood up. And as they stood on their pick-shaped toes, they balanced themselves while leaning forward.

Shells could be heard slamming into the barriers.

And beyond the impacts and shattering light, the M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda troops could be seen charging toward them.

"This battle will make a sensational change to every country's military value."

The battlefield moved forward. The defensive middle gods of war advanced.

Their pointed pick-like toes moved in unison with the long heels raised behind them.

The long heels were spikes, so...

"Launch...!"

On that command, the heel spikes were driven into the ground with a bursting sound. And...

"Charge...!"

Their heavy bodies used the recoil of the pile-driving to move forward with

their anti-warship defense barriers still opened over a wide area.

The defensive wall maintained its power as they moved forward to clash with the enemy formation.

Henri thought as she was hit by a heavy and solid wind.

...All battles from now on will allow mobility and defense to coexist.

So she looked into the sky straight ahead.

She spoke as she faced Hashiba's aerial fleet fixed in place there.

"What they are using will become an outdated tactic."

And...

"They use a great aerial force to eliminate their enemy's aerial forces and front line on the ground. Then they send in their own ground forces. And those ground forces perform a high-speed suppression using mobile shells and other troops specialized for high speeds. That is *the current standard*, isn't it?"

The ground warriors made an ultra high-speed charge and suppression while receiving support from their aerial forces.

That tactic made effective use of mobile shells which could move at high speeds and M.H.R.R. specialized in it thanks to their plentiful warriors.

The form was different, but P.A. Oda used the same method except with spell-supported speed and striking power.

...Their tactics take their nations' advantages into consideration.

It was far cheaper to build mobile shells than gods of war.

And as a mercenary nation, M.H.R.R. could freely replenish their supply of warriors.

Thus, M.H.R.R. had used these tactics to build up their military value in Europe.

But, thought Henri.

"That will end on this battlefield."

The wave was shattered.

As the human wave rode the wind and raced in from the east, the breakwater charged in from the west and shattered it.

The anti-warship defense barriers of the middle gods of war were a little narrow for use against ships. Each god of war could only protect an area 50 meters across and 20 meters high.

But that was a massive wall for the humans on the surface.

Even if these were mobile shells charging in, it was still on the human level.

They were not the same as gods of war.

When the mobile shells hit the defense barriers, they were smashed by their own speed. The armor-detachment and wearer-ejection functions activated just like they had been hit by a shell. With no chance to avoid it, they lost their weapons and lost some of their speed, but were still broken against the wall of ether.

The sound of destruction was like that of bone being struck.

The next sounds were of scattering mobile shells and bending frames.

No voices rose from the crashing wave. When the people had hit the wall, their lungs had been shaken and they could not breathe. The next wave realized something was happening by the wall but could not decelerate in time, so in the brief period before their wave crashed against it...

“———!!”

...they screamed.

But their enemy was different. The enemy was pushing through all of the impacts.

“Charge...!”

The god of war heels fired their acceleration spikes.

Those 30 reached their top speed even as the enemy waves resisted them. Their feet dug into the dirt like hooves as they essentially stampeded forward,

but their momentum simply pushed the enemy straight forward...

“...Ahh!!”

...and blew them away.

Their speed swept the enemy army forward as if they were stuck to the defense barriers.

Humanoid shapes flew in great numbers and they finally became an attack against their own comrades behind them.

The sound of human impacts rose from all across the battlefield, as did cries of confusion, terror, and anger.

It was all pushed and crushed by the 30 walls.

They could not be stopped.

As the sun's angle changed from morning to day, the human sea surged in, was broken, and flew through the sunlight.

The M.H.R.R. troops had been hit first, but they understood that they had been destroyed. Their charge's sudden stop had been clear to see.

But the nimbler P.A. Oda troops were not so lucky.

Because they were so light, they could not break through the air resistance and had thus been weaving back and forth as a diversion during the charge. That meant the unstoppable wall crashed into them from a diagonal angle.

“...!”

In a desperate attempt to escape it, they first tried to use their charm cloths to surf along the surface of that wall.

But the charging gods of war crushed those human movements. The defense barriers were supported by bodies larger than a human's, so they swayed with movements larger than a human's.

“Gwahh...!!”

The defense barriers swayed several meters forward and back, so when the P.A. Oda troops attempted to surf on them, the wall pulled away and then slammed back into them.

Most of them were sent tumbling through the air and then along the ground before they were hit again by the defense barriers that caught up to them.

Even those lucky enough to briefly manage to surf on the wall were struck by the wreckage and people falling from above, so they were slammed to the ground and then knocked away by the wall.

Every last one of P.A. Oda's warriors gave up on advancing. But even when they tried to dodge, they were crushed from ahead or above.

Before they could figure out what to do, they were destroyed by those arriving from behind.

But some of them were lucky. Enough wreckage from those ahead of them had piled up for them to use it as a ramp toward the defense barriers.

The defense barriers were about 20 meters tall, so if they used their acceleration for a jump...

"We can clear them!"

They flew.

Instead of a jump, it was more like a combination of speed, angle, and martial arts that got them over the defense barriers.

The panels of bluish-white light were more than a meter thick. The warriors performed midair flips as they flew out into the space beyond those individual lights.

"...!?"

But then gunfire sounded and the P.A. Oda warriors were knocked higher into the air.

They had been shot.

A few forms stood on the shoulders and arms of the middle gods of war.

They were maid automatons.

16 of them clung to each god of war and they kneeled down with rifles at the ready. But they were not just on the god of war's upper surface. Some used their gravitational control to stand on the side of the arms and shoulders to

send oil into the running god of war's motors and to operate the heat exhaust devices.

And the middle gods of war continued their charge while supported by those automatons.

Their wall arrived from the west and was approaching the midway point of the plain.

The battlefield was being pushed back to the east.

The morning sunlight shined on it all from the sky.

"This is going surprisingly well."

Henri walked quickly across the grassy plain as she listened to the great roar of the god of war footsteps up ahead.

The ground was broken below her feet. She occasionally trod on scattered grass or stepped over mobile shell wreckage as she hurried after the advancing wall.

The walls had already pushed the battlefield nearly back to the halfway point.

Henri spoke quietly as she viewed that great wall out front.

"An anti-warship defense charge performed on the ground by gods of war. This is a suppression attack that is defensive in name only. And," she continued, "it is nothing more than defense and a charge, so the pilot training can be reduced to the bare minimum. Previously, god of war forces were primarily heavy gods of war and the lighter varieties were only used for industrial work, but now they can do the same work as the main forces."

"And the best part is that even the vassal ranks can pilot the middle gods of war," replied Armand as he walked alongside her.

He grabbed his hat and swung it forward as if to sweep the blowing wind and scattering dirt away from him.

Then the maids fired from the left arm of a god of war up ahead.

They shot back a few enemies trying to cross over the wall.

The human shapes flew back through the air and fell beyond the wall.

Then they were pushed back by the advancing wall.

Armand commented on not letting even a single enemy through.

“An excellent job, don’t you think?”

“Testament. They must be plenty satisfied as well. But stop using visual signals. Just in case.”

“The maid automatons seem to like this better.”

“Then there’s no helping it.”

Just as Henri nodded and continued forward, a light raced by up ahead.

“Is that...?”

An attack flew in a horizontal line as if to break through the advancing wall, and a voice accompanied it.

A dignified girl’s voice rang across the battlefield.

“Finish this, Caledfwlch!!”

...Everyone is moving too slowly!

Kiyomasa was on the south end of the grassy plain.

Just before the enemy’s defensive charge, she had ordered for all troops to break to the left and right.

It had been a split-second decision based on her past experience.

But there were simply too many of them. The command had reached the company on the far left and right and they had managed to avoid the enemy’s charge, but the central company and those following had been too slow.

The central troops had contained a lot of freshmen warriors and that had increased the amount of damage they took. Even if the command had reached them, they were inexperienced on the battlefield, so they did not know how much speed to use or were too worried about others. And that led to this.

This battle would be an important experience for them. And as for Kiyomasa...

“I can do this...!”

She was one of Hashiba’s Ten Spears. In fact, she was the #2.

No matter the battlefield.

No matter how outnumbered they were.

No matter how mismatched their tactics were.

They existed to overturn that.

...We are known as heroes.

According to the Testament descriptions, her namesake of Katou Kiyomasa was one of those.

They were outnumbered here.

And their opponent’s strategy was one never before seen.

...But I must overturn that...

So she used Caledfwlch’s acceleration to race forward.

30 defensive middle gods of war were spread out across the grassy plain. She circled around on their southern end. She intended to reach the back of the enemy’s wall like that.

Of course, the enemy came to stop her. 4 platoons of 8 rifle-wielding maid automatons arrived from behind the gods of war.

They were 200 meters away and they fired without delay. Their arms were synced with their sight, so they would accurately pierce anyone they held in the center of their vision.

And that was what they tried to do. Kiyomasa was still controlling her position in midair, but...

“Activate defenses!”

The armor attached to her summer uniform was more than just spell reinforced. It would change its angle of defense to match the direction she locked onto with her gaze.

And it did so.

Immediately, sparks swept across the armor. This was a rapid-fire series of shots. With 32 automatons firing individual shots, they achieved a rate of fire exceeding 30 shots per second.

But Kiyomasa let her armor handle it.

Defense was dealt with automatically, so she spun the two Caledfwlchs around in her arms.

...Secure position!

The edge of the grassy plain was a cliff. There was a forest up top. This had likely been a riverside or a long lake originally. She kicked off the cliff face that reminded her of a riverbank and she spun around to face the center of the grassy plain.

She could see the side of the defense barrier wall being pushed forward by the middle gods of war.

It was a meter thick and 1.5 kilometers long.

She wanted to target the middle gods of war, but...

...The automatons' barrage is too thick!!

She could not get around to their side or back.

They had predicted her actions and were prepared.

But there was something she could target from her position.

“That thick defense barrier wall...”

She had a way to destroy it all at once, so she ignored the scrape of bullets stroking her cheek and raised her voice.

“Finish this, Caledfwlch!”

The 1.5 kilometer wall shattered into light.

From south to north, a straight line wave exploded.

A glowing sword pierced through the center and immediately disappeared, but the expanding shield split apart and shattered in the sky.

“————”

The troops being pushed back to the east saw the destruction in front of them.

Beyond the solid sounds of destroyed light, they saw the defenseless line of middle gods of war.

The enemy was in view.

The enemy gods of war were crawling with automatons who were already firing back.

But the enemy was in view, so even as they took fire and were injured...

“Testament...!”

“Shaja...!”

They roared at the top of their lungs as if to draw out everything inside them.

“Hurry,” someone said. “If we don’t, they’ll get the next defense barrier up!”

“That’s right,” someone replied.

The *lernen figur* for activating the defense barriers were already appearing from the shoulder launchers of the enemy middle gods of war. Once those were up, it was all over yet again. After all...

“The enemy middle gods of war haven’t slowed down any!” shouted a girl on the front line.

They all raised their defenses because they knew the enemy was prepared to do this.

And so they had to respond in kind.

“Go!”

They had to pass between the middle gods of war and continue forward. Westward. To the enemy’s main forces. Straight ahead. In a direct line.

“Let’s go...!”

They could see the enemy in the center. Two of the Three Musketeers were walking their way beyond the middle gods of war.

It was Henri and Armand. They were both dangerous opponents even when unarmed, but if the remaining forces on the east rushed in...

“Let’s go!”

They all nodded and said “testament” or “shaja”.

And then they all relit their mobile shell thrusters. They faced the two members of the Three Musketeers in order to...

“Run!”

A moment later, the exact opposite happened.

Before they could begin running, they saw an enemy suddenly charging toward them.

There was still distance between them.

But that distance was meaningless to what appeared without warning: gods of war.

It was 13 of Hexagone Française’s heavy gods of war. They appeared unexpectedly between the middle gods of war.

They were all running forward.

Their speed, weight, and weapons were all far superior to the middle gods of war. And their pilots were far better trained.

To those resuming their charge from the east, the heavy gods of war became an obvious counterattack.

They had been outdone.

The silver heavy gods of war prepared anti-ground assault spears down low as they charged in.

The enemy had taken the initiative in this charge.

Kiyomasa saw it happen from the side.

...How!?

The enemy gods of war had appeared out of nowhere. It was as if doors had opened on the ground.

“Stealth barriers!?”

That was the only explanation.

However, she had to add a “but” in her thoughts. After all, she had never heard of stealth equipment being built small enough for gods of war.

IZUMO existed in Hexagone Française territory, so she naturally suspected they had provided this new technology. But...

...IZUMO will have preserved its neutrality.

That may have been a naïve expectation. Whatever the case, she could not deny the truth before her eyes and it was further proven as time passed.

As her troops attempted a second charge, they were blown away by this counterattack.

“We’ve finally managed to confirm one thing,” said Henri as she walked along the grass.

She saw 2 powers charging eastward in front of her: the defensive charge of the middle gods of war and the offensive charge of the heavy gods of war.

They ran toward the morning sun that had already risen too high to reach.

“This is a tactic that the Reine des Garous thought up...and the Princess and Exiv put together.”

Simply put, they functionalized and split up the duties of the front line gods of war.

At IZUMO and Magdeburg, they had only been able to use the heavy gods of war and those had simply charged in, suppressed the enemy, and maintained control. Just like the development of mobile shells, they would make a high-speed charge for fear of ship’s guns while also making a traditional “knight’s charge”.

But at IZUMO, barricades had been launched and Musashi had been allowed to construct their front line.

And at Magdeburg, the enemy’s great numbers had robbed the gods of war of

their mobility.

Even if they did not lose the battle, that loss of mobility would rapidly reduce their military value.

So they had changed their tactics.

A change to those traditional tactics should have received complaints from the knights who piloted the heavy gods of war.

But they had just suffered through 2 difficult battles and most of the gods of war had been prepared by the previous Chancellor. Most importantly, this idea came from the Reine des Garous and had been improved upon by their two leaders, so they had agreed to this new tactic.

In this case...

...The vassals in the middle gods of war take the lead and then the knights in the heavy gods of war charge in to destroy the enemy formation.

A high-speed charge by the heavy gods of war could not suppress a wide area and could be ended if it was obstructed.

So the middle gods of war had first suppressed a wide area and secured a safe zone. Then just as the enemy was recovering and stalled, the heavy gods of war charged in at close range.

Also, the middle gods of war carried musketeer automatons and the warriors who followed extended their front line.

The previous tactics had entirely relied on the god of war charge, so the automaton musketeers and the nonhuman unit had only been able to follow after them.

But this time, the younger generation mostly made up of freshmen could move out to the front and gain battlefield experience.

They had only sent attackers to the battlefield in the past, but now the attackers shared the battlefield with the ideal defenders.

As the modern battlefield continued to move, the different units moved in and performed the job they were most suited for.

“According to the Testament, Hexagone Française had history’s first modern national army. This is our interpretation of that. You could call this a ‘god of war shell’ meant to bring down a castle or conquer a fortress city.”

Henri looked forward and saw the middle gods of war already preparing their new defense barriers. Her gaze pressed on the backs of those charging forward.

“Go. And show them the power of those promised victory by the history recreation.”

Chapter 5: Performers of the East and West

CHAPTER 5

"Performers of the East and West"



What in the world
Is happening here?

Point Allocation (Creation of a Container)

What in the world

Is happening here?

Point Allocation (Creation of a Container)

They were literally trampled.

Giant legs cut through the enemy troops and the wall of defense crushed the split enemy.

There was no bombardment from the sky. The ships were too afraid they would hit their own crushed forces if they attacked.

The gods of war consumed the battlefield while using their gigantic scale as a weapon. Instead of being pushed back by numbers, the heavy gods of war would cut through the enemy formation and then wait for the middle gods of war to catch up and protect them.

One of the gods of war raised his voice within that movement.

“Our battles used to belong to the knights.”

“But,” continued a female voice from the god of war in charge of cutting through next to the first. “Now the vassals work with the knights. ...This is the proper form of a knight’s battle.”

“Testament,” they all agreed as they pulled back after a charge.

They raised their spears as the middle gods of war and their defense barrier moved in. And as the middle gods of war pushed the enemy along, the knights prepared their spears once more and gave a cry.

“Vive la Roi!!”

Glory to our king.

“Vive la XIV!!”

“Vive la Mouri!!”

And...

“Vive la Anne!!”

“The previous Chancellor prepared the cup of power and the new Chancellor has filled it with the wine of new tactics!”

“Now is when everything is inherited by our new Roi-Soleil and Reine-Lune!”

So...

“Testament!”

With that shout, the heavy gods of war began a new charge.

Armand spoke as he heard the sounds of impacts and shattering.

“What do you think?”

Henri answered while facing forward.

“Whatever I think, we found exactly what we predicted and so we did what we had planned. ...Here they come.”

“They’re here, are they?”

“Testament. So look around us.”

Armand did so. He saw...

“Clumps of dirt and a grassy plain.”

“Yes. Now look forward.”

The middle gods of war were pushing everything forward at the moment, but...

“Are the enemy forces growing?”

“No, they aren’t.”

But...

“Did you see a single enemy on the ground on our way here?”

“...No.”

“Then the answer is simple. All of the enemy has returned to that side.”

“How? You saw how badly we were knocking them around.”

“Surely you know the answer. It happened already at Novgorod.” Henri sounded like she would really rather not be explaining this. “Bringing a Testamenta Arma into another nation. This is most likely P.A. Oda’s Crus Fortitudo – Vetus. I believe you know its effect.”

Hearing that, Armand pulled his hat low over his eyes and nodded.

His walking pace did not slow, but he did look up into the sky.

“It’s a troublesome effect. ...It turns their total amount of courage into defensive power, right?”

A certain movement was occurring frequently across the battlefield.

The people who had been hit by the wall, shot, or crushed shouted at each other.

“Hey...!”

They suddenly woke up, got up, and recovered.

They gasped at their lost equipment, but the battle was still underway. And...

“We’re okay!?”

“Yeah!”

Some of them were from different nations, but even if they had no weapons, there was one thing they shared.

“Anyone with courage is given an infinite defense!”

They stood up and only chose to withdraw, but they were all confident of something.

“We carried out our attack with courage!”

“I see,” sighed Armand inside the wall. “That was why they all rushed in with no fear. Even if their equipment was smashed, they were protected by a divine protection, allowing them to escape the battlefield or make a temporary withdrawal.”

“Is there anything we can do?”

“Fortunately, the divine protection protecting them only works once a day.” Armand sighed as he returned his hat to normal. “Does that mean we have to win this all over again?”

“We haven’t won it the first time yet. Don’t let your guard down, Armand.”

Henri looked up.

Someone stood on the bow of the enemy galley in the sky. The tall girl wore an M.H.R.R. girls uniform like it was a cloak.

She was long-lived and wore glasses.

“Hashiba’s Ten Spears #9: Takenaka Hanbei.”

Even at a distance, she could be seen holding up a long metal rod bearing a piece of armor.

It was the right half of a breastplate. The silver panel curved forward and emitted light.

“Mlasi views courage as a virtue. It is not good at all if they can use courage as a strategy outside their borders.”

Meanwhile, they heard voices from beyond the advancing defense barrier.

They were shouts but not screams. They came from those who were waking up and getting up from the initial impact.

“Is that...?”

“People are so much trouble,” said Henri as she stopped walking. “By recovering, they are aware of their newfound strength. They should have been damaged, battered, and unable to recover from that, so now they know how strong they are.”

“How do you think it works?”

“Testament. According to the Princess, Shinto says that people’s souls are shaped like an embryo or a *magatama*. But she speculated that it is everything people lose after birth that gives their soul a unique shape. That would mean human strength comes from...”

A *signe cadre* appeared. It displayed the head of a god of war automaton.

“Cutting away?” it asked.

“It’s hard to say.” The corners of Henri’s mouth rose a little and she tilted her head. “We may have been a later addition to the Princess, but I have determined we have still strengthened her.”

“Then could you put it like this? Human strength comes from the ability to accept what they have gained and lost and the ability to accurately view what shape that gives them?”

“For the time being, that is my conclusion. ...Look.”

Henri quickened her pace somewhat and pointed forward while crossing the broken ground.

There was a group of charging voices there.

“Ohhhh!”

The god of war unit was moving forward. They were all producing compression heat from the thrusters on their backs.

“That looks like fun,” said Henri while looking at their noisy backs. “At Magdeburg, we lost something important, but we also learned that we had gained something. Automatons like us can only compare our present fighting force to our past fighting force, but the god of war knights are different. They are aware of their shape after what they lost and gained. And...”

And...



境界線のライオン
Lion on the Edge of Nothing

Takenaka Hanbei

“The enemy also understands that on a smaller level. They have lost their equipment, but they are now aware that they are protected by the Testamenta Arma and their own courage.”

Henri looked up into the sky. The enemy was still standing on the enemy galley floating there.

“Does that Takenaka girl like the view from up there? ...Or is she here as her other inherited name?”

Henri named the girl who was standing tall with the Testamenta Arma held high.

“Kuroda Kanbei. The tactician skilled enough to bring fear and caution to Hashiba!”

Takenaka stood on the tip of the galley’s bow and looked down upon the battlefield.

The wind that blew up to reach her was a fusion of the morning east wind and the battlefield’s heated wind.

That battlefield wind carried the smell of steel, the smell of oil, and a heat that even felt sweaty. Takenaka raised the Testamenta Arma staff as that wind washed over her and entered her lungs.

“ ... ”

She fell to her knees, placed her hands on the edge of the bow, and emptied the contents of her stomach straight down instead of just into the air in general.

“Ero ero ero ero.”

Kiyo-Massive: “Waaaaah! Takenaka, are you okay!? You’re seasick against, aren’t you!? But if you’re going to vomit, try to do it on top of the enemy!”

Omaeda: “Kiyomasa, what if the enemy ends up enjoying that? There are people with bizarre interests everywhere. Isn’t that right, Mori?”

Mory: “Wh-why would you ask me that!? I-I have no interest in anyone else’s bodily fluids! If anything, I want to go through the proper process and be the

one producing the fluids! Or was that not what we were talking about!?”

Fuwaa: “What is this tentacle talking about so early in the morning? And are you feeling all right, Takenaka?”

Kuro-Take: “Oh, I-I’m fine. I’m fine.”

Takenaka audibly inhaled and wiped off her mouth.

“I’m completely fine, so don’t worr-ero ero ero ero.”

Kiyo-Massive: “Waaaaah! Takenaka, this is why I asked you if you should really be eating such a big breakfast!”

“B-but my predictions said the battle was likely to continue past lunchtime, so I had to eat enough to last me-ero ero ero ero.”

Kiyo-Massive: “Takenaka! How much did you eat!?”

Fuwaa: “How will knowing that help?”

Omaeda: “And you need to calm down, Kiyomasa.”

Matsu: “Calm down.”

“Ero ero ero ero. Ugh. Ahh, everyone down there needs to get out of the way. Ero ero ero.”

Lily Flower: “Hey, Toshi, I’m kind of trying to eat right now... For that matter, why do we have to watch the invasion of Mouri when we’re over here holding Sviet Rus’s provisional border?”

Omaeda: “Yeah, sorry, sorry. But, Na-chan, we sent over our leftover supplies and money for this battle, remember? As M.H.R.R. Treasurer, I have to keep an eye on how they’re using it.”

Takenaka sighed when she heard Sassa say “what a pain”. She pushed her glasses back up in time to hear Fuwa’s voice.

Fuwaa: “Should you go get some rest?”

“No, I can’t, I can’t, I can’t. Um, do I have anything to drink?”

After responding to Fuwa, Takenaka got up and rummaged through her cloak.

“Oh, I do.”

She held up a bamboo bottle in both hands. It said “Commander’s Traditional Stomach Medicine – Dry” on the side.

She took five big gulps from the bottle, took a breath, and tossed the bottle back into her cloak.

“Ahhh, that stuff is so good I want to vomit some more just so I can take some more.”

Kiyo-Massive: “Takenaka...please don’t get your priorities backwards. Think how the kitchen staff must feel after making your breakfast.”

“But the breakfast was really good. But it’s my responsibility once it’s inside me, so it belongs to me... I enjoy eating it, I enjoy throwing it back up, and I enjoy drinking the medicine, so that’s three times the enjoyment. Oh, but sorry to everyone on the surface. Okay? It must’ve been a surprise to have that suddenly fall from the sky. But don’t worry. It’s the same thing you all ate this morning.”

Kiyo-Massive: “Takenaka! Takenaka! You’re not helping! Some of them started crying!!”

Fuwaa: “Kiyomasa, you remind me of a Maeda who hasn’t learned when something’s a lost cause.”

Omaeda: “Ha ha ha. You aren’t complimenting either of us with that, Michi.”

Takenaka laughed too.

But then she took another breath and looked down.

The battle was on the move. Hectically so.

She nodded a few times and suddenly placed both hands on her glasses.

She then removed them and held them away from her face.

“Ohhh, I can see it, I can see it.”

She viewed the entire battlefield through the curved glass.

“Activate tactical measurement spell: Three Thousand Worlds.”

Three thousand *lernen figur* opened in an instant.

They were on the bow of P.A. Oda's galley-style ironclad ship. 30 groups of 100 *lernen figur* opened around Takenaka.

They each slid around her with rectangular movements.

"Prediction."

They all lined up front to back and faced Takenaka.

"Estimation."

They all lined up top to bottom and faced Takenaka.

"Result #1."

The group directly in front of her lined front to back and repeatedly updated their contents for a display loop. But...

"Result #2."

The group on her right did the same as the one in front of her. And...

"Result #3."

The group on her left did the same as the one in front of her.

"All others work at gathering the short-term situation."

2700 *lernen figur* lined up behind her like a backstage. They all displayed different parts of the battlefield.

Her comrades' battles, movements, and situations were progressing before her eyes. Some of them were knocked down or blown away, but she smiled and grasped the staff next to her.

And she thought.

...This is going well.

She held the Testamenta Arma named Crus Fortitudo – Vetus.

It had a useful effect.

...Everyone under its bearer's command will have their defensive power set to infinity just once a day when they make a courageous act.

A lot of the Testamenta Arma had defensive abilities, but this one was even more direct than the others. However...

“It only activates when the bearer displays her own courage first.”

So...

Kiyo-Massive: “Are you standing on the edge of the bow to display your courage? Takenaka, you’re not a small child.”

“B-but it did activate. Wait just a moment.”

She grabbed the staff and took a few steps back.

She moved toward the deck.

The Testamenta Arma immediately began to lose its light.

“See!? Did you see that!? Standing out here does take courage.”

Kiyo-Massive: “Takenaka! Takenaka! We aren’t receiving our divine protections down here! Hurry! Hurry on back! Some people are taking serious hits!!”

“Oh, sorry, sorry.”

She moved back.

The Testamenta Arma regained its light, but it was a little weaker than before.

“What is this...?”

Monkey Girl: “Are you more used to the stimulus the second time?”

“Oh, I get it. And Hashiba? Where are you?”

Monkey Girl: “S-sorry. I had to go in for a bit of emergency maintenance.”

“Yeah, you were preparing for all this last night, weren’t you? Thanks. Are you in the bath?”

Monkey Girl: “Y-yes, you could say that.”

A corridor had a window that gave a view of the color white outside.

It was a long wooden corridor and its window showed the white of snow from

an elevated position.

The corridor was on the port side of an ironclad ship stopped at the provisional border between Sviet Rus and M.H.R.R.

The ghost legs walking silently along the wooden floor belonged to Maeda Toshiie. He suddenly looked back.

“What’s the matter, Mori? Do you not feel like going to the morning assembly? I understand completely. It’s a psychological burden putting up with Shibata’s nonsense every morning.”

“N-no, it isn’t that!”

Mori shook his head and opened a *lernen figur*.

Mory: “Um, uh. Lady Hashiba!?”

Monkey Girl: “Wh-what is it?”

Mory: “Are you taking a bath!?”

Monkey Girl: “Eh? Oh, um, yes.”

Toshiie saw the tentacle deliberately slam his body against the wall again and again.

“Kwohhhhhhh! Begone! Begone, my evil thoughts! How dirty! Oh, how truly dirty!!”

The sound of the hits was disturbingly sticky, but...

“Kwohhh! Wh-why am I starting to get hard!? A-am I nothing but a dirty beast no matter how hard I try!? I-I just had a bit of a dirty thought, a-and now I’m getting all stiff just like a middle schooler!”

“Mori, can’t you just write this off as a morning thing? You did just get up, right? I think any guy would understand, so don’t worry about it.”

“N-no! I can’t lie to myself like that! I made sure to chant the heart sutra to drive out any dirty thoughts and calm down my morning hardening time! A-and yet here I am!”

“Then,” began Toshiie. “Aren’t you just making yourself feel good by banging against the wall like that?”

“D-do you take me for a pervert!? I am not the kind of tentacle that feels good banging against the wall! What an awful thing to say! Pun pun!”

“Then did you subconsciously think about someone you have feelings for?”

“Eh?”

The tentacle stopped moving but eventually started banging himself against the wall again.

“N-no! How could I imagine such lewd things about her!? I’m the worst tentacle there ever was!”

Asama noticed Naomasa walking into the Student Council Room.

The girl raised her false arm in greeting, so...

“Oh, Masa, how is the water heater for our spring doing?”

“I fixed it, Asama-chi. I was right and the frame got shifted out of place a bit during the side flip we did. I went ahead and submitted a suggestion to have a cushioning damper put into the underground district there.”

“Oh, really? Thank you very much.”

As Asama expressed her thanks, she noticed Naomasa was wearing her summer uniform pretty roughly, so she smiled a little.

“It looks like you went ahead and used the spring. Did you get the first bath?”

“Hah. We’ve got so much to do this week, so I can’t let myself get worn out on the first day. I spoke with your dad, and he gave me some sake to go with the bath.”

Mory: “I mustn’t! I mustn’t imagine her taking a b-bath! It’s wrong! I wish I had a shell I could close myself up in! ...No, I mustn’t imagine these weird thiiiiings!”

I've never seen Mori before, but it's fun to imagine the scenes he's in, thought Takenaka as she gained an understanding of the battlefield.

Things were not in their favor at the moment, but...

Monkey Girl: "Can you manage, Takenaka?"

Kuro-Take: "Oh, yes, yes. Things are going well here."

After all...

"I expect the new warriors have learned what it means to survive by now."

This was their first battle in the invasion of Mouri, but it was also their way of training the new freshmen. However...

...If we had only the freshmen fight, it would not end well for us.

So she had needed to prepare a mixture of experienced and new warriors, but that automatically increased the overall size of their troops.

That was dangerous when it came to training the new troops.

With so many new ones, all of their troops could crumble when faced with something unexpected.

And there had been a lot of possibility for danger this time.

Mouri had combined with Hexagone Française who were promised victory and prosperity in the future.

Plus, their previous Chancellor had left this world due to a dragon line reactor used by Hashiba.

As enemies, Hexagone Française and Mouri were not going to let their guard down and it had been obvious they would not hesitate to use new tactics.

So, thought Takenaka.

"That is exactly why we must send our new warriors into that harsh battle."

With their Testamenta Arma, they could return alive from even the harshest battle. They might not be of any use on the battlefield and they might only withdraw after getting knocked around a bit, but...

...They will always be able to trust in their own courage.

That would have great meaning to Hashiba's troops in the future.

Tactics and combat skills could be taught, but courage could not despite being the most important thing needed to survive on the battlefield.

...That is why I was sent in here.

She was the bearer of the Testamenta Arma of fortitude. But...

"Wahh."

Looking down was enough to frighten her.

She was afraid, but she was the tactician. She had long done deskwork, so she had gained the ability to cumulatively read the situation and to send out information before its recipient knew they needed it. She had wanted to continue on in the fields of economics and administration, but the academy she had long belonged to had been a problem. Her Industrial Committee had been ignored and the administration had failed.

So to admonish those at the top, she had inherited the Takenaka name.

She had performed the history recreation of Takenaka Hanbei's hijacking of the main family.

That had showed the main family how careless they were and it had been her way of saying goodbye.

...Before I went to join Hashiba.

She had assumed Hashiba would give her a job as a tactician, but her first request had been something else entirely.

"'I'm at the very bottom, so make me some money', hm?"

Monkey Girl: "Eh?"

That had been exactly what she had wanted to do.

Hashiba had already given Sunomata to Shibata and she had possessed Nagahama on Lake Biwa thanks to the history recreation. According to the Testament, she turned that into a profitable commerce area.

Takenaka had done so in half a year.

She had gotten to know Shibata, Niwa, and the others then and she had reached an understanding of their wartime relationships and the situations in P.A. Oda and M.H.R.R.

They may have set her up, but...

...It was fun.

She understood why she had not been able to act like a tactician until now and she understood why she could sympathize with Hashiba.

“Hashiba, you’re trying to keep all of the damage to the bare minimum, aren’t you? I tend to do that a lot too, but there’s one thing that is often said about me. Namely...”

Namely...

“I go for the greatest amount of damage to bring about the greatest result. Or simply put: high damage, high return.”

There was no doubt in her smile as she spoke and sent everyone their next instructions.

“So prepare yourself, okay?”

Henri saw something in the sky directly ahead.

“Are you doing this, Takenaka!?”

She had been able to predict this based on the tactics Takenaka had used in the records of past battles. But...

“You’re firing now!?”

The earth was shaken from the sky.

16 roars raced out, repeated themselves, and struck everything with great shockwaves.

But this was not targeting the defense barriers held by the middle gods of war.

“Is she targeting the heavy gods of war along with her own warriors around

them!?”

Kiyomasa felt a cold sweat on her back as she crossed swords with a god of war on the battlefield.

“The freshmen intercepting the gods of war need to fall back!!”

It arrived as soon as she shouted that.

Cannon fire poured down from the ironclad ships in the sky.

Physical shells were fired in quick succession.

“...!?”

The battling gods of war first looked puzzled. *Of course they are*, thought Kiyomasa.

After all, the attack on the gods of war was also hitting the M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda warriors. And a lot of them were the freshmen.

This bombardment entirely ignored their presence.

It arrived all the same.

The immense power hit them.

The explosive bombardment from the sky assaulted everything equally.

The ground was blown away, people flew through the air, and the gods of war were in the center of it all.

“They’re firing on their own warriors too!?”

They raised their defenses with more anger than doubt in their voices.

They used spells to activate anti-warship defense barriers, even if they were smaller than the ones used by the middle gods of war.

The sound was more intense than solid and Kiyomasa saw the heavy gods of war enduring the shellfire from the sky.

...Well done!

She was not talking about the heavy gods of war.

She was talking about Takenaka.

It was difficult to break through these god of war tactics with ground forces.

But it was possible with a bombardment from overhead.

So Takenaka had aimed for the moment just when their charge had ended. More than that, she had aimed for when they were distracted by the M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda warriors.

The defense barriers being used against the shellfire were automatic reactive types. They would automatically change their angle to deflect the shells most effectively.

That was only a small piece of information on their enemy.

But it could still influence their upcoming tactics. They knew a halfhearted bombardment was not going to get through to an Hexagone Française god of war unit, but...

“If they’re using automatic reactive armor, we can create an opening!”

The explosive blast arrived just as Kiyomasa said that. The shells hitting the gods of war and the ground had created a shockwave which in turn produced a racing wind.

The people near the gods of war were thrown into the air and the wind reached her like a solid wave slamming against her.

“Kh...!”

She endured the wind with her armor and bodily reinforcement spells and all sound briefly vanished from her surroundings.

A few people flew by over her head.

She could not even hear their screams.

They were those who had failed to withdraw in time and had been caught in Takenaka’s bombardment.

Of course...

...They were ordered to withdraw.

A *lernen figur* floated next to her face.

It belonged to Three Thousand Worlds.

Kiyomasa looked to the *lernen figur* sent here by Takenaka.

Three Thousand Worlds had distributed 2700 instructions. That was enough to inform the interception unit and the other warriors around them.

But Three Thousand Worlds was more than just a spell to disseminate information. When needed, all of the *lernen figur* would perform joint calculations and display a solution to the user's request.

It was a guiding hand that seamlessly displayed the method needed to survive.

The only thing like it was an automaton. The high-speed thoughts and decision-making were exactly the same, but Three Thousand Worlds did not have any of the accumulated memories or experience that an automaton did.

The emotionless 3000 provided the optimal decision.

...That is Three Thousand Worlds.

I can see why Lady Hashiba is in awe of her as a tactician and even studies under her, thought Kiyomasa.

Takenaka would use the most appropriate method but would also use any method available to her in order to achieve the maximum result.

She was the commander of this operation, so everyone had received an explanation of Three Thousand Worlds and knew it would tell them what they needed to do.

It currently displayed 3 primary plans and 1 extra plan.

The primary 3 were standard enough: intercept the heavy gods of war, deter the middle gods of war, and withdraw. But the last one...

...As a last resort, have the ships open fire even if it means hitting our own people.

But, added Kiyomasa in her heart.

Had any of the new warriors predicted that the last resort would be used first?

Kiyomasa, however, knew that Takenaka must have realized that last resort would achieve the maximum result.

So the Three Thousand Worlds disseminating that information could be seen as Takenaka's kindness.

After all, this plan would have worked just as well without using Three Thousand Worlds.

Kiyomasa understood what Takenaka was thinking.

The new warriors who had crashed into the wall at the beginning had done so because they trusted in their courage. That was why the courage divine protection had given them infinite defense and they had escaped unharmed.

"It was reckless, but she predicted what would happen."

Kiyomasa thought that had been an excellent decision.

With Takenaka, they could avoid personnel losses as long as they had courage.

And for the new warriors, a name inheritor like Takenaka was a good way to give them courage.

That was why they had to go on the attack here.

As a result, the front line had attacked and been crushed, but most of them had escaped unharmed.

But what about those further back who had seen the result of the initial charge and lost their nerve?

They did not have courage.

And so Takenaka had shown them kindness.

Just before the bombardment, when they would have been thinking “it can’t be”, she had used Three Thousand Worlds to send them a simple message: Prepare yourself, okay?

Those who had known what she meant would have been saved.

Those who had not would have been taken out of the fight.

It sounded cruel, but Kiyomasa knew what Takenaka was really doing here.

...Selecting the new warriors who can survive the upcoming battles!

Not bad, concluded Henri in her artificial brain.

Not only had Takenaka exposed the defense barriers being used by the heavy gods of war, but Henri understood what Takenaka’s real goal had been.

“Selecting the best of the Hashiba warriors.”

“What do you mean by that?” asked Armand from atop the head of a middle god of war up ahead.

He looked back her way while crouching down and she followed while wrinkling her brow.

“I mean the battles against Mouri are a race against time for Hashiba.”

“So they don’t have time to train their new warriors?”

“No, they don’t. How many more battles do you think Hashiba has?”

“Well,” said Armand as he looked up into shell-filled sky. “First up is the Mouri Battle against us.

“The Battle of Yamazaki to defeat Akechi as vengeance for Nobunaga.

“The Houjou Battle fought in Kantou, a rarity for Hashiba.

“The Battle of Komaki and Nagakute fought against Matsudaira.

“And then the Bunroku and Keichou Campaigns meant to invade the continent. That’s quite a few, isn’t it?”

Which meant...

“Don’t they need all the new warriors they can get? Even if they find the elites, they aren’t going to last long without large numbers.”

“That does not matter. After all, Hashiba will absorb Akechi and Shibata’s forces. Akechi’s forces include a lot of civil officials and are closely connected to Shinto, so those will act as Hashiba’s negotiators. Shibata’s forces include a lot of military officers, so they will join the warriors and become Hashiba’s foundation. But Akechi and Shibata’s forces are veterans. In a way, they are the negotiators and warriors of an older age. Looking at it that way, Hashiba needs to gather the new elites of their own forces before joining with those veterans. Hashiba will have trouble if those veterans aren’t impressed and they might take issue with the defeat of Akechi and Shibata. ...That is why Hashiba needs to train their new warriors. And the Mouri Battle is their last chance to do so.”

So...

“They will find the elites here. So they are first finding the ones with courage, but then they will show those courageous ones what happens when they lose sight of their orders and fail to courageously retreat. ...Hashiba will save those with courage but will turn on any who are only a hindrance. It is Takenaka’s job to demonstrate that to the survivors. Because they can’t let Hashiba do that part.”

“...You make it sound like Hashiba would be able to do the same thing.”

“Testament. That is correct.” Henri was jogging by this point. “Hashiba must use any means necessary if she is to continue the history recreation and attempt to conquer the Far East.”

“She takes things way too seriously. Don’t you think, Lady Oichi?”

Shibata asked that question in the ironclad ship’s officer’s mess.

Next to him, Oichi laughed quietly as she held out a breakfast omelet with chopsticks.

She narrowed her eyes.

“Could Hashiba kill the two of us, Katsuie?”

“I doubt it.”

Shibata sighed and came back to his senses when the omelet pocked his cheek.

“Oh.

[illegible]

Fuwaa: “Um, is there any reason to do it for so long?”

Mory: “Do it for so long? A-a girl mustn’t say those things so carelessly! You’re too full of openings, Fuwa!”

Fuwaa: “And now a tentacle is lecturing me...”

Oichi laughed and tapped Katsuie's right shoulder.

His right sleeve was removed, leaving the black arm exposed. There was a single white line on the shoulder continuing from under the arm to near the collarbone. Oichi looked at that and then at her own right shoulder.

Her right shoulder had a white line in the same place.

She looked at the lines on both their bodies.

“How lovely. ...The two of us finally match.”

“Yeah. And it’s nice that we were both told we could head back out on the same day. So we need to celebrate today. Hashiba, you’d better win.”

And...

“Takenaka and the rest of the Ten Spears? Don’t you hold back, okay? ...You’ll be Hashiba’s main fighters during my showdown with all of you.”

“Testament,” said Takenaka with a nod.

...Historically, Takenaka Hanbei had died by this point and Hashiba's tactician was Kuroda Kanbei.

That was part of why she had two inherited names.

The battlefield down below was hoping for the next action.

The charging heavy gods of war had been stopped by her bombardment. They

were effectively using their defense barriers against the overhead bombing, but they could not continue their charge like this.

By holding the heavy gods of war in place with her ships' guns, she could seal their movements even if the shells did not reach them.

...But they moved around quite well.

Their charging strength had been greater than she had predicted. If they had made 2 more charges, it was possible they could have reached the main Hashiba formation.

She needed to change Three Thousand World's settings and the databank.

But it was more than just the decision to fire the ship's guns that had defended against the enemy charge.

"Kiyomasa, I'm impressed by how precisely you instructed them to withdraw."

Kiyo-Massive: "Th-the battle isn't over yet!"

"That's true," softly said Takenaka as she ordered further shellfire.

Hexagone Française would be dangerous if they were not held back here. She had not expected to push them back just with the initial momentum, but she was impressed that they had managed to gradually force their way through it.

But...

"This is still within my expectations."

The battle was coming to a stop a bit east of the midpoint.

So Takenaka ordered the ships to fire.

Those on the surface no longer mattered. Pushing back the enemy gods of war with the ships' guns was what mattered. If she could stop the heavy gods of war and drive them back...

"The middle gods of war will come out."

That was why she had the warriors move forward.

But these were not the new ones. It was the veterans. They followed the

withdrawing movements of the heavy gods of war and tried to move through the gaps in the defense barriers held by the middle gods of war.

But then the automatons fired on them.

Even that experienced group was stopped by that.

Meanwhile, the middle gods of war tried to reactivate their defense barriers. They extended them horizontally to fill in the gaps the heavy gods of war had passed through. However...

“Yes, coming to a stop and refortifying your defenses. A good decision. ...For us.”

As soon as Takenaka said that, a straight line of power passed by below her.

It was a transport ship.

It was a super-high speed hammer. This transport ship strike had been used to bring down Magdeburg.

“I wanted to try it out myself.”

The attack accurately struck the center of the middle god of war unit.

The result was instantaneous.

The transport ship had flown in at an angle toward the center of the middle god of war unit holding the defense barriers.

The middle god of war there had just raised its defense barrier again in order to fill the gap a heavy god of war had returned through.

If it moved, a hole would open in the wall.

If it did not move, the transport ship collision would break through its barrier.

Takenaka’s attack forced it to make one decision or the other.

But a third option presented itself.

Just before it hit, the transport ship ruptured.

An attack had hit it in midair, causing its absolute destruction.

Kiyomasa saw what had happened in the air before her eyes.

The transport ship was approximately 300 meters long and something had pierced it from front to back.

...*No.*

It had not pierced all the way through. It remained inside the ship.

She knew what had happened.

...*An ultra high-speed but non-penetrative shell!*

Then the sound reached her. She heard the air tearing and splitting. A line of mist stretched from beyond the Hexagone Française middle god of war unit to the ruptured transport ship.

And that rupture soon transformed into a lightless explosion.

The internal shock tore off the ship's outer skin like the blooming of an invisible flower.

Kiyomasa saw the inside of the splitting and scattering ship.

All of its framework, floors, and interior structures were pushed out from the center and crushed before they pushed out the ship's hull. Some of the framework pierced the hull and continued to fly while other parts were twisted and transformed the hull.

But all of that only lasted an instant.

The torn hull split in every direction and was further torn by the weight and wind pressure within.

It scattered.

What had once been a transport ship flew across the entire area as mere fragments.

"Withdraw...!!"

Sharp-edged metal panels several meters across flew about like a blizzard and fell to the ground.

The fragments flew horizontally and swept away the people in their path, or they rolled across the ground like wheels.

Something else soon arrived: the explosive blast of the shockwave.

A chilly temperature arrived first and then an invisible wall struck everything within 300 meters.

The earth sank down, tore up, shifted, and slid around where the ship had been. The grass lifted up by that flew through the air, and...

“...!”

Nothing at all remained.

But the wind blew and Kiyomasa realized something in front of the cleared center of the grassy plain.

“What...?”

The Hexagone Française forces should have been directly ahead of her, but they were gone.

Only the empty grassy plain remained.

The enemy had left.

Chapter 6: Battle Formation Members in All Directions

CHAPTER 6

"Battle Formation Members in All Directions"



Huh?
I just noticed
My attempt at fortification is more like a siege
Point Allocation (Category of Responsibility)

Huh?

I just noticed

My attempt at fortification is more like a siege

Point Allocation (Category of Responsibility)

“It’s surprisingly hard to get information on Hexagone Française without K.P.A. Italia on our side.”

A man’s voice came from an area that was more a cultivated field than a flower garden.

Domed buildings were lined up within the forest atop a mountain near the ocean.

The sun could be seen rising to the east of Tres España’s Alcalá de Henares. In the garden near the hospital building, Españan Chancellor Felipe Segundo was tending to the flower garden in a summer uniform and a straw hat.

The sunflowers growing around him were even taller than he was.

He sprinkled water around and asked a question of Juana who sat next to him sticking a thermometer into the garden.

“They abandoned the battle and suddenly withdrew. Hexagone Française couldn’t have taken very much damage. And yet they fell back and allowed Hashiba to invade their legal territory. ...What do you think that means?”

“I would like to confirm one thing first, Chancellor. Do you think all things have meaning?”

“I think you are more than capable of telling apart what has meaning and what does not.”

“Testament,” nodded Juana.

She fixed her summer uniform’s collar and stood up. She looked up at the sunflowers that were also taller than her and spoke.

“I think Hexagone Française’s strategy is not a pre-existing one.”

“Do you think they’re looking ahead?”

“I am sure you understand, Chancellor, but...how many steps ahead do you think they are looking?”

Juana’s lips formed a smile and Segundo held his hands out to stop her.

“Whatever you say, I am from an older age, so you should assume I can’t always keep up with how the kids these days think.”

Are you listening?

“Before this battle, we learned that Hexagone Française had moved out to the forefront to preserve Mouri. At the time, we tried to use that to predict what Hexagone Française’s strategy would be. But...”

“In the end, Hexagone Française preserved even themselves.”

“Testament,” agreed Segundo. “Do you know what that means?”

“Testament. I don’t know if this was only coincidence or why they would have done it intentionally, but I can predict that Hexagone Française has some kind of strategic goal and that they’re outsmarting Hashiba here.”

“Precisely, Juana. You really do understand.”

Juana blushed and lowered her ears, but her eyebrows rose.

“You understand too, mister.”

“I just happened to be right this time.”

“Liar.”

“I am not lying.”

“You are.” Juana looked to Segundo’s feet. “There are a few stones lined up there. ...That’s a model of Hexagone Française and Hashiba’s battle formations, isn’t it? I was only guessing, mister, but you likely made an actual conclusion based on their positions in the battle. There is still a large gap between the two of us.”

“N-no, this is a *kifu*! It’s a *kifu*!”

“It is not.” Juana narrowed her eyes and delivered the finishing blow. “The

way you moved the second stone from the right was not a legal chess move. ...I saw it.”

Baseball Man: “Do you still call it a *kifu* when it’s for chess, Fusae?”

Track Woman: “When I see one of those from above, it really makes me want to sprinkle sugar on it.”

Elmo: “Hey, hey. I want a closer look! Let’s go, brother!”

Sister’s Brother: “Sister, peeping is a crime, but observation is love. Know the difference and observe your brother.”

Baseball Man: “Hey, Valdés Siblings. Keep an eye on those idiots.”

Sister’s Brother: “And that would be trust! Right, Captain!?”

Anyway, thought Segundo as he took a breath in front of the sunflowers.

Next to him, Juana poured him a cup of coffee from a pot.

“I more or less understand what Hexagone Française is thinking. It should be much more clear after another battle or two, but this could be both a good thing and a bad thing for Hashiba.”

“You mean...?”

“Testament,” said Segundo. “They create an attack over a surface with middle gods of war equipped with anti-warship defenses, and they have heavy gods of war in stealth mode to perform a charge. They also have a new kind of shell that can destroy a transport ship in a single shot. ...That was probably fired by Isaac of the Three Musketeers. They’re using these new tactics and this new weapon and then they quit while they’re ahead. Remove this from the context of ‘war’ and the answer becomes apparent. I can only guess for the time being, though.”

But...

“If I’m looking at this right, Hexagone Française is prideful, but at the same time, there is no sign of vainglory here. I think they are looking at the

Testament to a surprising extent and fighting the war of a new age.”

With that said, Segundo looked up.

Children were looking their way from the hospital building’s windows.

“I wonder what this looks like from above.”

“Ask them once the flowers are blooming and you will receive the most accurate answer.”

“Testament,” he replied, making Juana lower her ears and nod. He then said, “I’m curious what the other nations are doing and how they will respond. We all have to put all of our effort into this, after all.”

“Yes, because they are preserving Mouri and also preserving Hexagone Française. ...That means Hexagone Française is looking to the post-Sekigahara period.”

“Juana, you know what it means to be the winners of a war, don’t you?”

“Testament,” she replied.

She looked up one of the stalks that were growing day by day and she saw the large bud at the top.

She stared at it.

“The nation that has taken the least damage and retains the most strength will have the advantage after the war ends.”

“Exactly. ...And that means our war has not yet ended. The sun has set and it is rising once more. We still have Tres España and the New World, after all. So...”

Segundo waved at the children looking down at them.

“I am very curious what Musashi will do as the land of the rising sun.”

“So while we’re trying to prepare for our dealings with Houjou, Mouri and Hashiba have already clashed.”

Masazumi sighed in the Student Council Room now that Naomasa, Tenzou,

Mary, and Yoshiyasu had joined them.

...I'm not really sure what Mouri and Hexagone Française are thinking.

"Does this mean Hexagone Française is looking several steps ahead to prepare for the post-Sekigahara period?"

If they were preserving Hexagone Française as well as Mouri...

"This could be trouble."

Masazumi started to fall into thought, but she somehow managed to keep her gaze focused.

And she saw Yoshiyasu raise her right forearm.

"Is it really a problem if Hexagone Française and Mouri have preserved their strength going into Sekigahara? You and them are on friendly terms, aren't you? ...Do you think they'll betray you?"

"You have a point. It's being optimistic, but the Roi-Soleil and Mouri Terumoto are not the type for that kind of deceit. They wouldn't allow it on a personal level and their pride and vainglory wouldn't allow it on an official level."

"That's right," said Asama. "The Testamenta Arma and Logismoï Oplo choose their wielder. If those two chose to abandon their pride and vainglory, they would lose the ability to use those weapons."

"But, Asama, we need them to return their Logismoï Oplo."

The idiot pointed out something troublesome by way of Asama.

But he was right and there was important meaning there.

...Returning the Logismoï Oplo to Musashi is one option available to Hexagone Française.

If they abandoned their right to use the Logismoï Oplo of pride and vainglory by returning them, Musashi would owe them a large debt.

"That would give them an excuse to turn on us at Sekigahara..."

I'm probably overthinking it, thought Masazumi. But there was no point in being overly optimistic, so...

“Neshinbara, give me an answer.”

“...Are you serious!? You don't hold back, do you!?”

What are you talking about? And are you that happy that someone's paying attention to you?

But he was the only one to ask.

“If Hexagone Française were going to betray us, why would they do it?”

“Obviously it would be for a major victory that set them up as the ultimate victors.”

Neshinbara answered without delay.

“Listen,” he said with his hands on his hips. “They would win with a fighting force overwhelmingly more powerful than anyone or anywhere else. And not just in a short-term war. They would win the long-term conflicts of the 30 Years' War and the Warring States period. ...Listen. I'm talking about being the ultimate victors. Enough that they can ensure that no more wars are fought in the Far East! If they can do that and they don't need their pride and vainglory to do it, then they can easily abandon those two things. After all, if everyone else has been badly beaten, then they don't even need weapons like that. So...”

So...

“For now, they are preserving everything they have while gathering new tactics and a new fighting force. That fits perfectly with a desire to be the ultimate victors. That is why I propose we form a definite alliance with Hexagone Française. Then our single peace can stop Hexagone Française's 'what if' scenario.” He took a breath. “What a simple question. ...I kind of wish you had a harder one for me. Do you, Vice President Honda-kun?”

“No, that was sufficient.”

Masazumi admitted to herself that this was a problem.

...So Hexagone Française, future ruler of Europe, is setting things up to become the ultimate victor.

She needed to keep an eye on that.

She had of course already been focused on the conflict between Mouri and Hashiba, but from now on, she needed to hold meetings on what that conflict would mean and what would happen from there.

Otherwise...

“We might suddenly realize that Hexagone Française has already conquered the world.”

She was worried about the Peace of Westphalia.

What if Europe gathered around Hexagone Française to oppose their common enemy of P.A. Oda and the Hashiba-led M.H.R.R.?

Musashi’s friendly relationship with Hexagone Française would only give them the right to participate at the level of “a friend”.

Also...

“I will be an obstacle, won’t I?”

That comment came from Mitotsudaira. With Horizon back, she was second in line to ruling the Far East.

“As Lord Motonobu’s daughter, Horizon was given provisional right to rule the Far East back at Mikawa. But if she inherits Lord Motonobu’s name, then my inherited name of Mito Matsudaira comes from the generation after Lord Motonobu...”

“Judge.” Masazumi nodded. “After Horizon’s inherited name and history recreation are complete, the Far East’s inherited names will be reorganized for the new generation and Hexagone Française will be able to use Mitotsudaira to intervene in the center of Far Eastern politics. That’s what you mean, isn’t it?”

“Judge. Of course...I will not let them do that if I can help it. I am sure Hexagone Française will use the peace of the Far East as bait to get me to listen to them, so I doubt they will simply exploit us.”

Mitotsudaira began frantically waving her hands back and forth.

“Oh, but I’m sure I don’t sound very convincing saying that. And...”

Her shoulders shrunk down and she hung her head.

“I have no interest in serving another king.”

I will not serve two masters, thought Mitotsudaira.

As a child, she had tried to protect but lost Horizon. After some twists and turns, she had found someone she could call her king.

She did not think she could find a greater king.

The biggest reason for that was the knight and king relationship she had with her king and that had become a turning point for her.

Unlike as a child, she had lost something, so she understood what it meant to protect and had made a vow.

There was no problem with her relationship with her king, and the friends around her all had their own roles and goals.

Her heart saw it as a good atmosphere.

Of course, the world of politics was not easy and people could be tossed around by the movements of the world. If Hexagone Française abandoned her, she would lose her title as a knight.

...But...

Even if that happened, she was a Far Eastern student and she belonged to the Chancellor's Officers.

At the very least, their master/servant relationship would continue as Chancellor and 5th Special Duty Officer until graduation.

Besides, she would graduate as a Far Eastern student this year.

Even if they started serving another king, she doubted that king could position himself to make full use of his power before graduation.

...So...

Just as Mitotsudaira began to build up her resolve, the half-nudist turned around in front of her. His face was pale with worry and he waved her over.

“U-um, Nate...-san?”

“Wh-what do you need all of a sudden?”

“Well, y’see...”

As he spoke, her pulse began to race.

Had she said something strange and led this in a negative direction?

Horizon was here now too.

Would he try to return things to how they had been in the past? Would he show his concern by trying to grant her freedom?

...I don't want that...

She prepared those words in the bottom her throat.

And then the half-nudist spoke.

“You’ve got your position, but if you’ve gotta choose, choose me, okay? You’re my knight after all. Isn’t that what we promised way back when?”

Mitotsudaira was at a loss for words. But the idiot turned to Masazumi.

“Umm, make sure you understand this. Nate’s with me. If you’re thinking of her as part of Hexagone Française or a negotiator or something, make no mistake about that. After all...”

After all...

“She can hold her own against Hexagone Française’s Vice Chancellor.”

“Th-that was, um...”

“Let’s just leave it at that,” said the idiot before turning to Horizon who sat next to him. “Horiz-... Why are you trying to pull up the tatami mat!? Noriki’ll have to fix that.”

“If you understand, there’s no need to say it.”

Everyone averted their gaze. But the idiot spoke to Horizon.

“You’ve got Futayo, right? And I’ve got Nate.”

“Is Tenzou-sama not an option?”

“He’s, well, yeah...”

“Wh-why did you trail off like that!?” protested Tenzou.

“Stupid ninja,” said Naruze as she sat in a desk drawing out a storyboard on a Magie Figur. “He’s saying you and Mary need to focus on your work as the 1st Special Duty Officer.”

“Judge,” said Mary with a nod while Horizon also nodded.

“The information I have gathered has indeed told me that Mitotsudaira-sama has a king and knight relationship with Toori-sama. But...”

But...

“If Hexagone Française expels her and she is stripped of her status as a knight, she will no longer be able to call herself one. And even if she does, I have determined she will only be pretending.”

She said it.

She was not being especially harsh. That was a perfectly realistic possibility in the future.

What would Mitotsudaira do if Hexagone Française stripped her of her status as a knight?

But she had already prepared her answer to that.

...We keep our Chancellor’s Officers relationship until graduation.

“Don’t be silly.” The idiot spoke to the princess. “You’ve got Futayo with you at least provisionally, right? And I’m not a king yet, but Nate’s still my knight. ... But you know what? I swear I will become a king in the future. Even if that means relying on all of you and begging you for help. And then Nate will be my official knight. And until then...”

Mitotsudaira heard it.

“Nate can reserve her spot as my knight of her own free will. She won’t be pretending. I’ll just be getting help from my future knight. ...There’s no way I won’t become a king if I do that.”

Mitotsudaira noticed something in his wording.

...“There’s no way I won’t.”

He believed he would, but he still had to remind himself of that.

Was her king worried too?

If he was worried about whether or not he would become king, that was her failing as a knight. So...

...Judge.

“Horizon.”

Mitotsudaira placed her hand on the chest of her track suit.

“Even if I am expelled from Hexagone Française, I will still be my king’s knight.”

“I see,” said Horizon. “It will be a lot of work.”

“Judge.”

“It will be an incredible amount of work.”

“...Judge.”

“He will hide porn games in your house and peep on you in the bath.”

“...J-judge.”

“Waaaaait! Stop trying to kill her confidence!!”

“Why should I stop?” asked Horizon.

She then placed a hand on her chin and slowly said something more.

“This is like a battle formation.”

“I suppose you could say we each have our own roles, trust, and relationships.”

Masazumi listened to Horizon.

“From Mikawa to here, we have had our interactions with Europe, Kantou, and Oushuu and we have built up some of those in a friendly direction. That has greatly expanded Musashi’s political foundation, and...”

Masazumi understood what she was saying. From a political viewpoint, it was obvious.

...If we’ve increased our international political power...

“We have increased the possibility of being influenced by the other nations.”

“Judge,” agreed Yoshiyasu. She crossed her arms and sighed disinterestedly. “The world does not revolve around Musashi. That’s what this means.”

She continued.

“For example, the nations that have a friendly relationship with Musashi will sometimes fight their own wars. What if you receive a request for support from both sides? If they ask you to transport supplies, which side do you prioritize? That choice will create ‘levels of friendship’. And when Musashi works to expand its strength, let’s say a nation supports that decision. Why do you think they would do that?”

“It either benefits them or hinders one of their enemies,” answered Masazumi.

“Judge,” confirmed Yoshiyasu. “With the notable exceptions of P.A. Oda and the undeveloped regions, Musashi has gone around to almost every powerful nation and engaged in diplomacy. But that also means Musashi can be influenced by all of those nations.”

“Um, Satomi Student Council President? What happens if we just ignore the other nations?”

“A good question, vassal. ...A powerful nation can probably trample on the smaller nations and do everything its own way. But if that isn’t possible, it will be crushed by the other nations surrounding it.”

Everyone gasped, but Masazumi had her own opinion of Yoshiyasu’s view.

...That’s a little extreme.

Even if Musashi did ignore the other nations in its actions, they would not

necessarily be surrounded by enemies right away. After all, Musashi had the unique advantage of being mobile.

In that case, the surrounding nations that could not share in that benefit and the alliance of nations that sided with Musashi would be pitted against each other. But...

...Making sure we have as many allies as possible while also achieving the greatest benefit for ourselves is what we call politics.

With more allies, they could escape being surrounded by enemies and some nations would change their position.

It all came down to politics. And they were making as many preparations on that front as they could. Also...

“Horizon, that is why you called this a battle formation, isn’t it?”

“Judge.” Horizon nodded. “A great number of nations, academies, and factions are sure to get involved with us in the future. But during all that, I would like for all of you to keep your own roles in mind. And if you fulfill your role, Toori-sama and I will reward you the best we can as a sign of trust.”

“Eh?”

That confused comment came from Mitotsudaira. She quickly waved her hands back and forth.

“I-I, um...”

“Don’t worry, Mitotsudaira-sama. You made a very important example for everyone else. No matter what might happen, you will stand before Toori-sama as his knight. ...And, Futayo-sama, you are the same for me, correct?”

“Judge. Even if you lose your provisional inherited name, you will still be Lord Motonobu’s daughter. And my father served Lord Motonobu.” As she sat on the floor, Futayo picked up Tonbo Spare from the floor next to her. “If you will inherit and fight for Lord Motonobu’s will, then bringing you victory will be my goal.”

“Judge.”

Masazumi thought to herself as she watched Horizon nod.

...They really have changed.

Horizon would sometimes do or say bizarre things, but she could now give her opinion on political matters.

Futayo had decided on a goal and was living her life to prepare for that. (Even if that life seemed awfully focused on food.) As Masazumi watched them...

...Would it be prideful to feel like they're catching up with me?

But Masazumi herself did not have an inherited name and had yet to complete her goal of world domination. That put her in the same place as them and her growth rate was actually inferior to theirs.

It's time to pull myself together, she thought with real faith in herself.

"I think this battle formation will change in the future," said Horizon.

"But for now you're next to me, Horizon," said the idiot.

"Indeed." Horizon gave a small nod. "I appreciate having that position in the formation."

"After all..."

Masazumi heard Horizon begin her explanation.

...Is this what I think it is?

Horizon and the idiot are confirming each other's position in the formation, thought Masazumi.

And then those two exchanged a glance.

"Toori-sama, you said you would create a kingdom where I could dream. But before that, you have to become a king, don't you? And just as I will be able to dream in the kingdom you create, I believe everyone else will have their dreams come true."

Asama's shoulders trembled at those words. She looked over in surprise and Horizon continued calmly.

"If you are to allow me to dream just like everyone else, then the hurdle in

front of my dreams will only continue to rise during the time it takes you to become king. Are you sure you can do this?”

“Y-yeah... I’m feeling really worried now.”

“Aoi, this isn’t the time for that kind of reaction.”

“I was just kidding!” insisted the idiot, but Masazumi knew he was not.

And Horizon must have taken his words seriously, too.

“But even if you are worried, you will do everything you can to make it happen, won’t you?”

“Oh, well, yeah,” readily admitted the idiot. “And everyone’ll help me. So no matter what happens in the meantime, Horizon, you don’t have to feel sad. And I won’t feel sad either. Neither of us is alone. We’ve got a literal ton of people with us. Well, maybe not literally. But that doesn’t matter. Anyway, everything from now on will have some meaning to it, don’t you think? After all, it’s all a step toward us being happy and you being all kinds of happy.”

So...

“You can stand next to me, look to all the others, and get your best tsukkomi in on me and the others.”

When she heard that, Horizon looked up a bit. A few sign frames appeared and disappeared.

“Judge. I understand. Musashi’s first objective is to raise you up to the position of king and to allow everyone else and me to dream. Right?”

Masazumi gasped when she heard that.

...Our first objective? You mean that isn’t our final objective!?

But the idiot nodded.

“That’s right.”

Yeah.

“Some dreams can continue forever and others can be updated. There are some you have to continually work at and there are some that come true all at once so you can move onto something else. So Horizon. For you, having a

dream and then making it come true are only your first objective.”

The idiot breathed in and turned around.

“Seijun. ...How are we compared to Hexagone Française?”

“In what way?”

“You’ve said Hexagone Française is looking several steps ahead, right? Then where are we looking? We’re after world domination, retrieving Horizon’s emotions, and creating a kingdom full of dreams...but all that’s only our first objective.”

The idiot asked his question.

“We’re looking that far ahead, so how is that compared to Hexagone Française?”

“It’s not even comparable.”

Honestly, thought Masazumi. She crossed her arms, raised her eyebrows, and closed her eyes, but she could not stop the heat from rising to her cheeks.

Tsukinowa swung gently on her shoulder because it understood how she was feeling.

This is nothing but a bluff, she thought as she spoke.

“All we have are our goals. We don’t have a path leading there.”

“You’ll make us a path, won’t you?”

Was he referring to Mikawa? He always remembered the weirdest things.

But back then, she had promised to do just that and then she had resisted even the head of the Catholics. So...

“No matter what Hexagone Française might be plotting, I’ll do something about it.”

“Oh, I don’t think we need to worry about that. At the very least, they won’t ignore us.”

Masazumi’s eyes widened at the idiot’s words.

“What do you mean?”

“Heh heh. I think I know what he’s saying.”

Asama listened to what Kimi had to say while sitting with her knees to the side and reaching her hands forward to approach Toori.

“The Apocalypse, right?”

“...? Um, Kimi, why would that mean Hexagone Française won’t ignore us?”

“You don’t understand? ...There might also be that Genesis Project thing, but the Apocalypse can be influenced by retrieving Horizon’s emotions. That’s what her cruel papa said.”

Meaning...

“No matter how much pride and vainglory they have, Hexagone Française can’t call themselves the ultimate victors or conquerors if they can’t stop the Apocalypse.”

So...

“Even if we have a friendly relationship now, we will definitely come into conflict with Hexagone Française somewhere. And because they understand that, they are working to preserve their forces and doing what they can to plan ahead. ...They are very much focused on us. Just like no one can keep their eyes off an excellent woman.”

“They want my Logismoi Oplo that badly?”

“Sin is an attractive spice, Horizon! That means you’re like delicious furikake every day! You’re noritama! Yes, noritama is great! It makes me think of oyakodon!”

The crazy person held a hand out toward Asama for some unknown reason, but Asama did not have anything to give her. She wordlessly slapped away the idiot sister’s palm, so...

“What was that!? Isn’t this when you’re supposed to give me what you have for me!?”

“I don’t have anything.”

But, thought Asama before saying more.

“I don’t know if they’re focused on us, but if they are, that would be all the more reason to find a chance to speak with them.”

“Judge,” replied Masazumi. “We need to avoid fighting if at all possible. Since Hashiba will begin conquering the Far East after their war with Mouri, we want to avoid conflict with Mouri until Sekigahara. Even setting the Logismo Oplo and Apocalypse issues aside, I hope Hexagone Française can become a stable ruler of Europe.”

“Yeah, that sounds about right,” said Toori. “Then,” he added while turning toward Horizon and Mitotsudaira. “Seijun, you think about what we’ll do from now on. It sounds like the situation’s really changed. And as for our ‘formation’, um...Tenzou you stay over there somewhere. Just do whatever.”

“Wh-why are you being so vague and not even looking my way!?”

“Master Tenzou, he is telling us to keep it casual.”

In her track suit, Mary relaxed her sitting position on the cushion.

Toori started with Horizon.

“I’ll say it again: You’re next to me, okay?”

Next, he looked to Mitotsudaira.

“Nate, you’re in front of me, okay? Well, you’re physically behind me right now, but this whole formation is figurative.”

“A-are you sure?”

“It is fine, Mitotsudaira-sama. Besides, I cannot become Toori-sama’s knight and he and I cannot build mutual trust based on a relationship of master and servant. I do have the Logismo Oplo, but I only really have a shield-shaped battery, the Muneshige Cannon #1, and the Muneshige Cannon #2.”

“Master Muneshige! Master Muneshige! You’re throwing yourself to the floor instead of just falling to your knees!? That’s new!”

That couple is putting together a nice performance there, thought Asama as she watched Mitotsudaira breathe in.

“Then that will be my position in your formation.”

The wolf breathed a sigh of relief and Kimi laughed quietly.

And then Toori turned toward Asama and delivered a verbal surprise attack.

“Asama, you’ll be by my side, won’t you? I’d really appreciate it if you were.”

The words seemed so sudden that Asama was unable to react right away.

By his side?

“...Eh? Ehh?”

She remembered that morning and her heart briefly pounded hard in her chest. Then he nodded once and spoke.

“Yeah. I guess I’m saying you could support me in a number of ways. There’s also my contract. I know you’ve got a lot of work to do, so you only have to do it if it wouldn’t be too much trouble.”

“Eh? O-oh, right. This is about your contract! Yes. Um, Toori-kun, I am in charge of you and Kimi there and I can handle that.”

“Oh, so that’s an OK? Then keep it up like always. Oh, and if you can, make my lunches and do my laundry too.”

“Oh, well, we have always been something like a family in that regard. So yes, I can do that too.”

“Judge.” Horizon nodded too. “I would appreciate that as well. Not only can you manage me, but you are a rare individual who can actually get Toori-sama to listen to you.”

“Eh? Does he really listen to me...?”

“You didn’t know...?” muttered everyone else as she put a hand on her chin and groaned in thought.

But if Horizon said so, it was likely true.

...I-I should try not to think too much about that. Yes.

Kimi smiled bitterly next to her and swept her hair back.

“Foolish brother! Horizon! Where does your wise sister fit into all this!?”

“Kimi-sama, you can be freestyle.”

“Sis, you get to be ‘my sis’. And...”

And...

“I’ll keep my promise. So help me out.”

Hearing that, Kimi’s eyebrows briefly rose, but...

“Silly boy... You really are a foolish brother.”

Without hesitation, the sister smiled, hugged her brother from behind, and rubbed her cheek against his.

“Ah, wait, sis, that tickles. Ahh, stop, stop, stop, stop. I’m naked on the bottom half right now.”

But Kimi only laughed quietly and refused to stop. She frolicked with him like a kitten.

Asama and Mitotsudaira exchanged a glance, but...

...This...

It was what Kimi sometimes did with the girls. When she liked the person or what they had said, she would embrace them, rub her cheek against them, and get close to them to better know them. Suzu was the most common victim, but Asama and Mitotsudaira were also often on the receiving end. However...

...It’s unusual for her to do it to Toori-kun.

Those siblings often seemed on the same wavelength to the point of being nearly identical, so it was quite something if they were growing even closer.

As Horizon watched the two of them, she spoke as if she now understood something.

“Toori-sama and Kimi-sama seem to come as a single set, so I am glad to have you both so close by.”

“Heh heh. Well done noticing that, Horizon. Then I’ll give you what you want: I’m right here, right now.”

Kimi moved in between Asama and Mitotsudaira.

And then she spoke so only Asama could hear.

“Now then, now then. ...Asama?”



“Wh-what? You seem to be in a really good mood.”

“Indeed I am.” Kimi narrowed her eyes and let out a heated breath. “Combine what my foolish brother said here with what he said at Novgorod. ...

Mitotsudaira and you have basically married into the family with approval from the wife, haven’t you? So,” she said. “The rest is up to your own efforts.”

“Wh-what are you talking about, Kimi!?”

Mitotsudaira listened as Asama raised her hips and her voice.

...Wh-what is this about?

She had a feeling she knew, but before she could say anything...

“Anyway, I’m looking forward to how you handle this, Asama, Nate.”

Mitotsudaira was within arm’s reach, so Kimi rubbed her head.

The gentle hold on her head and hair tickled, but Kimi did not seem to know where her head was. So...

“Nn.”

Mitotsudaira raised her head and exposed her throat.

...If she’s going to treat me like a dog, I prefer it like this.

And...

“Oh, are you itchy here?”

The idiot noticed what she was doing and scratched her throat.

The first thing she noticed was that his nails were shorter than the other day. The skin of his fingers touched the skin of her throat, so she felt the texture of his flesh directly.

It felt like his hand was licking her throat.

But the way his nails sometimes caught on her skin was a problem.

How was it a problem? The soft stroking of his fingers tickled and filled her with hesitation over how defenselessly she was letting him have his way with her skin and flesh. But...

...Hee.

Something like faint pain mixed in like a spicy flavor.

It was like finally getting to eat something delicious and finding it had clumps of strong spices mixed in. But her body reacted more to the spiciness than the sweetness, so...

...Hyah.

The sweetness and spiciness arrived intermittently where she most strongly sensed this flavor.

“Are you itchy here?”

She did not want to say no and she started wondering how long until he would stop, but...

...I-if this is my reward for confirming my position as his knight, I am a very cheap girl...!

But she could focus on the happiness for the time being. She had confirmed her position as knight while taking Horizon’s presence into consideration.

And as Horizon looked her way, the automaton girl started stroking her hair.

...Yes.

She felt a heat building deep inside her. If she had a tail, she was certain it would be wagging. And...

“Did you pee yourself in joy? Are you okay?”

Behind her, Kimi’s hand lowered along the center of her butt.

“Hyah! Wh-what are you doing, Kimi!?”

Asama listened as Mitotsudaira quickly raised her hips and her voice.

...I know this all too well. Whenever Kimi does or says something, we spring to our feet like toys.

It felt like the girl was completely manipulating them, but Mitotsudaira seemed to be handling it well. She thoroughly protested Kimi’s actions and then

she held her hands to her cheeks.

“I need to go wash my face.”

Naruze’s pen came to a stop.

“...Should I draw up a sketch?”

“Ga-chan! Ga-chan! Even among friends, that would be a crime!”

“I-I’m just fixing my makeup.”

“In that case.” Asama got up. “I want to use some water for a bit of purification, so how about I accompany you?”

...Without Mito here, all of Kimi’s damage would focus in on me...

After standing up and taking a breath, Mitotsudaira turned around. Her eyebrows were raised in slight surprise, but then she smiled bitterly.

...Eh?

Why was she smiling like that?

Without answering Asama’s unspoken question, Mitotsudaira turned toward the door. Yoshiyasu stepped out of the way and Mitotsudaira’s smile lost its bitterness before she spoke.

“Let’s go then, Tomo. ...We’ll be right back, so wait a moment, everyone.”

The door closed and the two girls’ footsteps echoed down the hallway in front of the Student Council Room.

Then the bathroom door could be heard opening and closing.

After 5 seconds, Naruze spoke up.

“...She definitely pissed herself in joy.”

“Nate isn’t that much of an animal.”

“Foolish brother, all women are animals. You need to understand that. You’re something of a heroine, so who knows when one of them will try to devour you.”

“My crossdressing’s reached that level, has it?”

“Wait a moment,” said Masazumi. “We’ve more or less decided on our future policy, right?”

“You mean deepening our friendship with Hexagone Française?”

“That’s part of it, but there’s more.” Masazumi looked across everyone gathered there. “I said it before, but I will now reiterate what we need to do first: In order to support Hexagone Française from Kantou...we must think up a way of defeating Houjou.”

“So we start off with thinking, huh? That isn’t going to end well.”

“Don’t speak for me, idiot.”

Masazumi smiled with the ends of her eyebrows lowered and looked to the idiot and Horizon. Then she returned her expression to normal.

“Anyway, all of that is the beginning of the ‘path’ I will pave for you this time.”

“Then we’ll just have to head down that.”

“I would appreciate it if you did. After all...” She nodded. “That is how we can get actively involved in the Far East’s history from here in Kantou and it’s how we can gain more allies.”

Chapter 7: Exchangers in a Surrounded Place

CHAPTER 7

"Exchangers in a Surrounded Place"



Umm

Is this really a place for conversation?

Point Allocation (It Just Ended Up That Way)

Umm

Is this really a place for conversation?

Point Allocation (It Just Ended Up That Way)

Asama was in the girl's bathroom.

Mitotsudaira was there too, but Mitotsudaira was in a stall.

"Mito, were you really so overjoyed that you, um...?"

"I-I didn't! I swear I didn't!"

"..."

"P-please don't fall silent like that!"

Oh, right, realized Asama. She wouldn't like that if she makes any noise. So...

"Should I play a song? Or should I play the sound of the waterfall behind my shrine to help you along?"

She went with the latter option. The sound of the great cascade reverberated through the bathroom.

...Oh, this is nice. It sounds really purifying.

"Tomo! Tomo! I feel like I'm going to wash down the toilet!"

"Then I'll change it to the sound of water coming from our spring."

She did so.

She now heard the sound of a smaller, quieter, and yet definite stream of water flowing through the air and falling to the water's surface.

"Yes, this sounds like a nice small stream."

"Tomo! Tomo! What if someone thinks this sound is me!?"

"I'm not sure there's much we could do about that..."

"I suppose you're right..."

She had no choice.

Asama tried opening the window. There were no roofs or anything else giving a peeping angle and she doubted any of the transport ships flying within the Ariake could see inside here.

At this time, she could hear the delivery workers and transport ships swaying and swooshing through the air. She could also hear the sounds of construction and repairs.

This was the sound of morning's end. And as she listened to that, she also heard Mitotsudaira's voice.

"What do you think, Tomo?"

"Think? About what?"

"About your position in the...battle formation."

"Battle formation? Shrine maidens aren't allowed to shoot people, you know?"

"Eh?"

"What do you mean 'eh'!? It's true! It really is!"

That said, she did of course know what Mitotsudaira was trying to say. She had simply put a lid on it so she would not have to think about it too much.

Besides, she thought while looking up and out the window.

"I belong to the Asama Shrine."

She knew a lot of people who lived on the Musashi.

"The Asama Shrine's god, Konohana Sakuya, was established as a god during the Age of the Gods, but due to being a woman and due to what her divine protections were, her presence creates a 'mold'. So a woman is best for using our shrine's power."

"The whole idea of shrine maidens being virgins doesn't actually have much to do with Far Eastern Shinto rituals, but since purification works by keeping out anything unnecessary, getting married would hinder your purification as a shrine maiden, wouldn't it?"

That was exactly right. That was why marriage and the various matters

associated with it were taboo for a female heir to the Asama Shrine. Her god would bless her if she did so, but by placing something else above her god, distance would grow between them.

“A female heir can’t do any of that until she finds someone to be her heir.”

Her father was the official heir, but as a man, he had apparently had a fair bit of difficulty. A male heir had to find a partner who would give birth to a suitable heir.

She had heard that her late mother had married for love, but that had only been allowed because her mother happened to have the appropriate abilities.

Asama herself would have no difficulty inheriting the Asama Shrine.

But on the other hand, she could not live a normal life until she found an heir.

“Tomo. Naruze was asking about this earlier for reference material. ...She wanted to know how a shrine maiden could become the same as everyone else.”

“Well, our Sakuya also handles matters related to love, so if you forcibly do those things to one of our musicians or shrine maidens, it’ll earn you some serious divine punishment. So be careful.”

Rules like that were not limited to Shinto.

The Catholics banned sex crimes against another Catholic or a pagan.

Their god would not allow any harm to fellow Catholics or to someone who might become Catholic.

“If I remember right,” said Mitotsudaira. “For Catholics, the first offense hits your crotch with a bolt of lightning and castrates you for 3 years. ...And it comes from within, so it is impossible to dodge.”

“Catholicism certainly is strict.”

Meanwhile, Catholicism had no such restrictions when it came to heretics and Protestants. This was all in accordance with the Testament descriptions. That was why the Catholics had been able to cause such great tragedy during the sack of Protestant Magdeburg and it was why the Protestants and Catholics would “fulfill both supply and demand” using crossdressing warriors.

The crossdressing warriors would sometimes be sent to a normal battlefield due to a miscommunication and that would apparently cause quite a scene, but since Naruze had excitedly called it “reference material” it could not be all bad.

...But those crossdressing warriors are a major doujinshi genre that goes by the name “Spartan”.

And so...

“Musicians and shrine maidens are like terminals the god uses to obtain offerings and information, so the god will of course protect them. And that protection comes in both defensive and offensive forms. Defensive ones are primarily of the stealth variety and the offensive ones are direct attacks.”

“Just out of curiosity, what exactly is an offensive divine punishment?”

“Oh, there are all kinds. It changes depending on the level of your contract and some cases are different when it’s between a Shinto musician and another religion. And since our Sakuya is a mother god, even if it comes down to a punishment, the other person won’t be executed. Because that would make their mother sad.”

“Oh, is that so?”

Yes.

“So if it looks like they’re going to commit a crime, their shrine’s pillar is pile-bunkered into their butt using teleportation and they’re only castrated for half a year. Surprising, isn’t it?”

“That’s direct! That’s really direct!”

“And it apparently comes from within, so it’s impossible to dodge. I’ve never seen it happen though.”

“It’s strict too! I can see why Naruze omits that part!”

“Well, no one would imagine it’s set up that way. And I’ve told Naruze that it’s probably best to just draw it however she wants.”

“...You’ve read a lot of her stuff, haven’t you?”

“Well, only the girl ones and the ones with Toori-kun-...I mean nooooo. I

haven't read any of theeeeeem. And you're a pretty big genre yourself, Mito! Toori-kun takes you for walks!"

"That's getting way too kinky way too fast!"

Mitotsudaira then took a breath and asked a question.

"But when you get down to it, what is it you want to do, Tomo?"

"Eh? W-well, the Asama Shrine supports Musashi, so..."

If she left, it would do a lot of damage to Musashi's infrastructure and contracts.

...So I can't even think about these things.

But just as she thought that...

"I was asking what it is *you* want to do."

"Eh?"

After voicing her confusion, she thought about what Mitotsudaira had meant. And...

...Oh.

Oh, no, she thought. I just about opened up and thought about something I had placed a lid over.

It would be best not to think about it.

Rationally, she did not know what would happen. But she was confident that she would lose everything if it all remained the same.

So she calmed her breathing.

"..."

And she closed it. The lid had started to open, but she closed it back up without looking inside. She placed the lid on, tightened it, tapped it once from above, and nodded.

...G-good.

She had held it back. She had suppressed it. So everything was the same. And...

“Mito.”

“What is it?”

“Please spare me that.”

There was a delay before an answer arrived.

A few seconds definitely passed and she heard the distant voices of people erecting a pillar for some kind of construction.

“...Understood. I got carried away there.”

Asama heard exactly what she had hoped to. Her rejection of this had been accepted, but...

...Ah.

She felt like something large was about to spill out.

She held something in her hand and, instead of making a decision on it, she was going to just throw it out. And by letting the other person see her throwing it out, she was hoping to gain their understanding.

...This is...

Not good.

Asama recalled something.

Long ago, a certain boy had been lost and then returned, but he had been different afterwards. It had scared her.

She had used that as an excuse to keep her distance.

In doing that, she had not known what would happen and she had not known what she should do. But she had felt like nothing would change if she preserved the status quo.

She had essentially thrown out that decision.

In her fear of change, she had looked the other way and thrown it out.

And so when he had “returned” thanks to Kimi, she had been hesitant.

What had changed had returned to normal through yet more change.

Her father had called it purification.

“When something is greatly defiled and then purified, it becomes even purer than before.”

Even Shinto had a story in which purity was created by purifying the unclean: by caring for an unclean being instead of detesting it, it was changed into a splendid god and a hunk of gold.

So...

“Look at him properly, Tomo. You were not the one who purified him, but that is why you must purify him from now on. Assuming you don’t want that to happen again, that is.”

She remembered.

She remembered, but she thought going any further would be dangerous.

She felt like her father’s admonition from the past and some childish promises made back then would connect to the present. But...

“—————”

Asama remembered.

What was about to spill from her hand now was the same thing she had done in the past.

Back then, she had looked the other way and hoped it would all sort itself out in time.

But things were different now.

Unlike back then, she was not looking the other way. She was avoiding looking at the actual contents, but she was not trying to forget the weight of what she held in her hand. So...

“...Mito!”

Shortly before Asama made up her mind, Mitotsudaira sighed and rested her

cheek on her hand in response to the conversation with Asama.

...I got a little too excited there.

Her position was settling into place and they were looking to the future. Horizon had proclaimed the meaning of their formation and her king had agreed.

There was no more reason to hesitate.

As the others found or were given a greater grasp of their position through the coming battles and negotiations, they too would enter this formation.

Their connections went beyond the Chancellor's Officers and the Student Council.

Nor was it just Class 3-Plum. It was more all-encompassing than that.

...It is my king's formation.

Had she been too excited or playful in hoping that she could find someone she could rely on in that formation?

But Mitotsudaira thought about something else.

She recalled when Asama had said she wanted to start a band. They still continued that when they had a chance, but when it had begun, Asama had been a mess of nerves and anticipation.

Mitotsudaira had been the same.

And she thought this was the same here.

This formation would likely be used against Hashiba and Nobunaga. They had already made allies in Oushuu and declared their comeback. They would naturally gather together with even stronger and more obvious bonds than before.

So Mitotsudaira would like it if Asama was there and if she could rely on her. Also...

...So would my king, Horizon, and Kimi...

Mitotsudaira's position as knight had been included alongside the close relationships of lover and sister.

So she had to wonder how Asama would fit in if she joined as well.

But Mitotsudaira also had to acknowledge that Asama was heir to the Asama Shrine.

She was the Shinto Representative and that made her crucial to the world.

And so there was no helping it.

“Sigh...”

Mitotsudaira sighed and let the tension of joy leave her shoulders.

...Yes.

Perhaps because the tension had left her, that time arrived: ...*The battle begins!*

She prepared herself. And at that very instant, she heard the unexpectedly loud sound of Asama leaning against the door.

“...Mito!”

“Eeeeeeeeeee!!”

The battle was delayed.

“Wh-wh-what is it!? Is it an emergency!?”

“Eh? An emergency?”

After asking Mitotsudaira that through the door, Asama heard the half-werewolf clear her throat.

“...So what is it?”

“Oh, well, you see?”

She knew this would sound lame, but she had to say it.

“I-I said before to please spare me this, right?”

But. She had to say but. She would regret it otherwise. So she had to say it. She had to speak her mind.

“I’m the kind of person that says that kind of thing without thinking. I kind of

have to given my position, but, um, if you want to, Mito...”

She could not let herself think about why there was heat rising into her cheeks. She simply gave her request.

“Could you talk to me about that kind of thing again?”

She thought this was horribly selfish. She was asking while assuming it would be rejected. And she knew this was something she would normally have to deal with herself.

...But I’m Musashi’s Shinto Representative and part of the Asama Shrine.

Her primary god was Konohana Sakuya. That was the god of birth, marriage, matchmaking, and love. She was also the god of water and sake brewing.

She understood she served that sort of god and she understood all of the divine protections that came with that, but she also placed a lid over it when it was about herself.

And she knew placing a lid over it would only allow it ferment and grow.

But putting a lid on those things was her nature.

So she wanted someone to remind her when it was about time to remove that lid.

“Can you do that for me?”

She did not receive a response for a while.

And so she leaned toward the door.

“Can you not?”

...Oh, I’m trying to force it onto her now. So...

“You can’t, can you? Ah...ha ha. Um, well, uh...”

She had made a weird request.

This was strange. She had been so desperate to prevent it from spilling earlier, but now she was laughing it off even as it was about to spill. But...

“Tomo.”

After taking a breath, the voice continued.

“So unlike the past, you aren’t going to pretend not to see it?”

After a while, Asama confirmed what she was asked.

“...Yes.”

It was a short response, but...

“Then I will be the Mouse that binds you with my king. Kimi and Horizon will invite you too. And if you ask me...”

“Yes?”

“There is no way my king has not given this any thought. ...Don’t you think? He has never once forgotten or overlooked us, has he?”

“—————”

She heard quiet laughter from beyond the door.

“Just like you were in the past, I think I am in too much of a rush to do something. So when we realize we can’t do anything, we end up keeping our distance. Especially you since you have your work and your position at the Asama Shrine. So I have one other thought: you need to rely on others.”

“Eh...?”

“You don’t understand? You might be alone as the heir to the Asama Shrine, but you are not alone as one of us.”

So...

“So just as I rely on you, if you rely on me, I will help you out.”



Things were different in the past, thought Mitotsudaira.

Back in elementary school, she had only just arrived from Hexagone Française. Asama had already been friends with the Aoi Siblings and Horizon, but she had still primarily been the “Asama Shrine Girl”.

...She had already lost her mother back then, hadn't she?

Partially due to that, she had been too perfect.

She had looked after the idiot, the idiot sister, and the princess and she had also worked at the shrine.

She had always said doing all of that was “the least she could do” with a perfectly composed expression.

But Asama had changed after Horizon was lost and after he had returned different.

She had stopped saying anything.

Even Kimi had stopped inviting anyone out to play, so anxious days had continued for all of them.

But the day after Kimi had brought him back, she and Asama had taken him to school with Asama in the lead. The idiot and his sister had been the same as always, but Asama had been a little different.

She had fallen asleep during class.

She had likely been mentally exhausted. When she had woken to find the idiot laughing at her, she had blushed, but with that, everything had returned to normal except for the absence of Horizon.

“Tomo, I think you are a very well-made person.”

“...Eh?”

Mitotsudaira decided not to mention the porn game poison tasting or the doujinshi, but aside from that...

“You do such a good job looking after Musashi and our contracts. But when it comes to yourself, you use Musashi and us as an excuse to close it away. I think you need to do something about that.”

That's right, thought Mitotsudaira as a bitter smile naturally reached her lips. And...

"For those things, you can just tap us on the shoulder and let us know."

Asama sighed.

It was a deep sigh that seemed to let all the tension out of her body.

...I...

Yes.

...I can at least think about what it is I want to do, can't I?

She wanted to give it some serious thought eventually. And...

"Mito, thank you."

"No, no. It's just that Kimi went a little too far without ever giving a proper explanation."

Asama knew exactly what she meant.

"Kimi really can look way too far ahead. She predicts what people will do in the very end and she acts based on that, so it can be hard to know how to respond to her sometimes."

"I think you mean all the time."

They laughed quietly together and their breathing seemed to synchronize.

They laughed as they discussed a friend who was not here. But they knew she would have zero problems with this if she heard them.

That was how well they knew each other. And so...

...I can rely on them when it's something they can help with, can't I?

Asama was really bad at that. She had always known that, but there had been nothing she could do thanks to her shrine work.

But if there was nothing she could do, she only had to rely on someone else.

She was glad she had friends she could rely on.

...Kimi might have crossed the starting line and forcibly pulled me along, but Mito was the one that made sure I continued on.

Where were they headed? Wherever their destination, the others would help her and ask for her help along the way.

So...

“Yes.”

She made up her mind a bit.

And she decided to demonstrate that later.

“That sounds like fun.”

And just as she said that...

“Um, Asama-san and 5th Special Duty Officer? The Chancellor is saying you’ve been spending a pretty long time together.”

Adele opened the bathroom door and peered inside. And...

“————”

Adele froze in place.

Why? wondered Asama as she thought back on their situation here.

...The heir of the Asama Shrine is leaning against the door of the stall Mito is in.

An awkward sweat started to seep out onto her back and the back of her thighs.

“...”

Adele shut the door.

“Ah, wait! Adele!”

She called out to the girl, but Adele was fast.

“Chancellor! Chancellor! Asama-san is pressed against the stall door listening to the 5th Special Duty Officer’s noises and saying ‘that sounds like fun’! Just as Vicereine Horizon predicted!!”

“Did this just get 2 or 3 times worse than I thought!?”

“Um, Tomo?”

“Eh?”

After removing herself from the door and asking that question, she heard Mitotsudaira’s voice from the other side.

“I’m just about at the critical point, so can you play the waterfall sound?”

Asama pressed her forehead against the door and smiled bitterly. Then she complied with Mitotsudaira’s request.

Immediately, the door burst open again. It was Kimi.

“Asama! Mitotsudaira! The Tottori Castle supposedly just arrived at Edo! According to the information Masazumi received from her dad, Hexagone Française is responding with some actions of their own, so we’ve ended the meeting to head out and check on the situation! Did you see that!? I’m taking this seriously for once! Now, do you want me to join you in listening!?”

Kimi looked to Asama, but she made an immediate about-face.

“Foolish brother! Horizon! Asama and Mitotsudaira are using a waterfall noise to disguise that they’re giggling about something with the stall door between them! They were having a duet while I wasn’t with them!”

“Not you too, Kimi!!”

It ultimately took a few minutes for them to catch their breath and head to the top of the Ariake with the others.

“Has the Ariake made any movements?”

A transport ship decorated with the six coin emblem of Sanada Academy flew through the sky of western Kantou.

Three people stood on the deck in summer uniforms: Kakei, Unno, and...

“Mochizuki, can you observe any motion? We won’t be able to see it once we meet up with the Shirasagi, so we need to record it while we can.”

Unno was speaking to an automaton who wore her hair up. She wore a Far Eastern style summer maid uniform and her eyes were directed toward the eastern sky.

“I have determined it is summer. The air is wavering quite a bit, but the air current left by the Ariake is indeed producing thin clouds.”

Mochizuki pointed at some flat wavering clouds floating far to the east and then she pointed south.

Their ship was flying south, but a bit to the right of its heading was Edo Bay where two giant silhouettes floated. They were not as large as the Ariake visible in the distance, but one of them was 6 ships measuring more than 6 km long floating in the air above Edo Bay. The other was a large transport ship measuring more than 1.5 km long.

“That is the Azuchi and the Tottori Castle. The Houjou fleet has ascended around them to protect them.”

“It’s the large nation pushing around the small and medium sized nations. That’s pretty much what’s happened to us too.”

“Kakei-sama, even large nations have their own rankings and future territories to worry about.”

Mochizuki gave that comment while looking to the northern sky. Beyond the bluish-black mountains of Oushuu, something was visible below the hazy white sky.

“Kakei-sama, Unno-sama, can you see that?”

“Testament. ...Mogami and Date, huh? I recognize the Yamagata Castle, but is the Date one the Aoba?”

“Aircraft carriers all look so alike that it’s hard to tell them apart.”

“Testament. I have determined it is the Aoba Castle,” said Mochizuki. “When the Azuchi Castle moves tonight, they will most likely relay its location to their merchant fleets at the Ariake for as long as possible. And they will continue watching from that position until those fleets have left and safely returned to their territories.”

“A large nation’s intentions just keep spreading and spreading, don’t they?”

Unno spread her arms in exasperation. When she lightly spun around, Kakei spread his mouth horizontally and sighed.

“That’s not cute at all.”

“I wasn’t trying to be cute, silly.”

Mochizuki nodded at that.

“Everyone knows that you practice every single day, Unno-sama. Kakei-sama’s opinion aside, we can use your power as a Yamaga shrine maiden while in this land. Unlike in IZUMO. ...If the Azuchi begins to move as part of Hashiba’s forces tonight and if the Musashi also takes action, we will likely be able to provide a decision concerning Musashi. So...”

Mochizuki gave Unno and Kakei a smile.

“I hope that happens.”

Chapter 8: Gatherer at the Surrounded Sea

CHAPTER 8

"Gatherer at the Surrounded Sea"



You can see it in the distance.
It also exists nearby.
Point Allocation (Like a Wave)

You can see it in the distance

It also exists nearby

Point Allocation (Like a Wave)

“They certainly had a long journey. And they’ll be heading back before long.”

A voice rang out above the ocean that reflected the morning sky.

It was in the sky above a large bay.

That surrounded portion of sea had an entrance opened on the south and ships would occasionally travel in or out through it, but one structure cast a greater shadow than any other.

“The Azuchi Castle will finally be joining the invasion of Mouri.”

A woman’s voice came from the west of the bay. A giant but slender three-hull ship floated in the eastern sky there. That high-speed aerial warship bore the name Shirasagi Castle and a woman in a moon-colored summer uniform stood on the central bow with her hands on her hips and her eyes on the eastern sky.

She was viewing a large black ship with 6 hulls in the land port built on the shore.

The name Azuchi Castle was visible on the bow of the flat ship.

Then an *insha kotob* appeared next to the woman. It displayed a girl with her hair tied back high on her head.

“Takigawa-sama, this is Fukushima on the Azuchi Castle. We have completed the transfer of control to the Tottori Castle. We will leave port at 8 tonight and continue straight to Mouri without resupplying.”

“Shaja. Good luck. I hear the other side kept the upper hand and made a mess of the first battle in Mouri today, but we planned for that. This begins for real starting tomorrow. You’ll be there by then, won’t you?”

“Testament. We have our end-of-term exams, but we intend to rush through those tonight. In Mouri, they are working out who will be the elites of the

Hashiba forces. ...Or so Takenaka-sama says.”

“Take was so excited about getting into the Ten Spears, but she hasn’t changed at all. She’s still so down-to-earth and severe. Will you tell her not to get seasick? The frontline commander has to be on a ship, after all.”

“I hear it is too late for that...”

“Ha ha. She’s also inherited the name of Kuroda Kanbei, a tactician feared even by Hashiba, but she’s still a complete lost cause on that front. She should probably remake her body a little. ...Anyway, it’ll be sad not to have the Azuchi Castle around anymore, but that’s just how it is. For a while, it was split apart to take the place of the devastated villages in the area, but it really shines when it’s all together. It’s a good ship.”

“Testament. I am glad to hear thee say that. And thank thee very much for accommodating us even though we will be leaving so soon.”

“Yes, yes. Hashiba was at Lake Biwa Azuchi for an interim report, right? Did you get any souvenirs, Fuku?”

“Testament. I got some Edo Bananas, including enough for the rest of the Ten Spears, but should I really have gotten so many?”

“To be honest, we’ve had way too many of them since there are almost no tourists now. The Asakusa specialty known as a Black Thunder Crackers are pretty good, but Asakusa is Musashi, right? I feel like someone would complain.”

There was movement beyond the Azuchi Castle as Takigawa spoke. The Tottori Castle, a large transport ship behind the Azuchi Castle, was beginning to move into the land port. Takigawa followed it with her eyes.

“This is really a new situation for Edo. Look, Fuku, the Ariake has removed its upper surface stealth to watch us.”

Some white cirrus clouds were visible in the northeast sky. Fukushima looked to them inside the screen.

“Takigawa-sama, thou should keep an eye on them. Kiyo-dono and I need to retrain ourselves.”

“Don’t worry,” said Takigawa as she smiled and looked to the right, which was west.

There was a black galley fleet there. It was fortifying the west side of the bay.

“We have the Houjou Association of Indian States fleet. ...Because I’m supposed to be the inspector of Houjou and the rest of Kantou. So if I’m going to return to Lake Biwa Azuchi...”

She laughed and crossed her arms.

“It’ll be after the Battle of Kanagawa. ...According to the Testament, that’s when Houjou rebels against me. And after that sends me back, I don’t do much more of import. After I side with Shiba at Shizugatake, I retire until I meet my end at Komaki Nagakute. So I think I should do what I can here.”

“Takigawa-sama...”

Fukushima started to say something but held her tongue. Then she put on a flat-eyebrowed expression over the *insha kotob*.

“Kiyo-dono and I...and Wakisaka and the others too. We will visit Kantou on occasion. And with the Bunroku and Keichou Campaigns, Yukinaga-sama and Kuki-sama can visit thee too.”

“I can speak with Cookie and the others over the divine transmission. You underclassmen don’t need to worry about an upperclassman like me. Besides, I don’t really understand it all, but you all have a fair number of memories concerning Kantou, right?”

“Testament. That is a secret, so I cannot say much. ...There is something that I wish we had been able to deal with while we were here, though.”

“It’s fine. P.A. Oda doesn’t question people’s pasts. That helped me out too.” Takigawa laughed. “Well, leave Kantou to me. Even if something happens, I’ll return the Shirasagi Castle to Hashiba and sink the Musashi. You lent me more than enough of a fighting force for that. Although that’s left us so busy with school events that Mr. Picky won’t shut up about it.”

“Yes, Akechi-sama does an...impressive job of carrying out his duties as Representative Committee Head despite being in Kyou...”

“Shaja. Fuku, get some sleep. You’re heading out on the first ship tonight, aren’t you? ...Night is good. The moon is the symbol of P.A. Oda. It’s a source of power.”

The sun was setting in the sky. It began to grow a little yellow, but it was still bright. Takigawa took a breath as she looked to it.

“This is the sky of early summer shifting into summer.”

She looked across the orange-dyed sky and saw a bluish-black color and bright stars in the east.

And to the north, she saw some horizontal fog and some small ships in the distance.

“That would be the Oushuu merchant fleets. The Ariake has removed its upper stealth, so we can see them now. But...”

While Fukushima said that, those ships suddenly vanished.

The Ariake’s stealth barrier was back up.

They were hiding. At the same time, the second-in-command ran up the stairs leading below deck.

“Lady Takigawa! The Ariake is fully hiding itself behind its stealth barrier once more!”

Takigawa sensed definite willpower behind the Ariake’s action. She might have been imagining it, but...

...They’ve made up their mind.

Her second-in-command held out an *insha kotob* that displayed a close-up image of the vanishing Ariake.

But Takigawa smiled and kept her eyes on the northeastern sky.

“They’re watching, they’re watching. They have to be watching our actions here. And the Mouri battle has to be inspiring them to action of their own. They’re probably rebuilding their motivation right about now,” she said. “It’s been a week since they got back from Novgorod and summer break is coming

up soon, so they must be as busy as us working through their official events. Their elation after victory at Novgorod will be wearing off, but if they don't act now, that power and willpower are meaningless."

"Then, Takigawa-sama, are thou saying...?"

"Shaja." Takigawa nodded. "They're after Houjou and they want to leave Mouri indebted to them. So when the Azuchi leaves tonight, the Musashi will probably leave as well. For example..."

For example...

"They might fire on the Azuchi to do as much damage as they can to the supplies and troops being transported to Mouri and then they won't attack Houjou. In doing that, they can show they have no hostility against Houjou, which will help them in the negotiations leading into the later Tensho Jingo Conflict and Siege of Odawara. But..."

"But?"

"There's one obstacle preventing them from reaching the Tensho Jingo Conflict and the Siege of Odawara: me."

Takigawa smiled bitterly and thought about her Testament descriptions.

"Yes, according to the Testament, I grow restless when I hear of our master's assassination, so Houjou attacks me and I lose the castle I'm using to manage Kantou. ...That's the local battle known as the Battle of Kanagawa."

That carried a few difficult problems. After all...

"It's only after our master's death that I lose my castle and retreat from Kantou. So if Musashi manages to establish my retreat, it will raise one of the Kantou flags for our master's assassination. But..."

"That is done by Houjou and not Musashi."

"Right. That isn't Musashi's job. And Hashiba has control at the later Siege of Odawara. If Houjou carelessly drives me out, they will meet the same fate as Edo. But if Musashi does not act tonight, they will lose both the opportunity and their reputation as a nation. The other nations will think they were helpless as the Azuchi left before their eyes. Mouri would probably be the one to protest

the most.” Takigawa smiled. “It’s tricky. Musashi has to get Houjou to attack us and they also want Mouri to be indebted to them. So what will they do? This can’t be fun for them. As for us...”

What would they do tonight?

...It’s simple.

“Tonight, we need to get Houjou to say goodbye to Musashi.”

That would fully draw Houjou into their own ranks and it would let her safely negotiate her retreat from Kantou.

“Of the flags left for our master’s assassination, the most important ones for the expansion of our power is the invasion of Mouri and my retreat from Kantou. But Hashiba and I will manage that. We will at least protect our master’s assassination through summer break. And after summer break when all the necessary preparations are complete...”

Takigawa breathed in before continuing.

“We will execute our master’s Genesis Project.”

“—————”

“Listen, Fuku. You need to calmly leave for Mouri tonight. And when you see Houjou turn on Musashi, I want you to tell everyone something. Tell them that I’m working out in this remote area all on my own and that they aren’t to forget about me, okay?”

Takigawa relaxed her shoulders and looked to the Azuchi Castle.

“Can you do that?”

Masazumi stood on the lift descending the inside of the Ariake’s outer wall.

...I need to give this some thought.

Around her, the others were recording and analyzing the scene of Edo and the movements of the other nations they had just seen. The nudist was not doing anything, but that was fine since the alternative was much more dangerous.

But Horizon asked a question.

“Masazumi-sama, what will we do when the Azuchi Castle takes action?”

“If possible, I want to send the Musashi out and fire on them.”

The enemy is probably thinking the same thing, Masazumi told herself while bracing her heart and looking to the others.

She knew just who to leave this with.

“Neshinbara, put together a strategy. I want to have some definite friendship with Houjou tonight.”

“Really!?”

Neshinbara turned back and spread his arms. There were some worrying aspects to his expression, but she decided it did not really matter.

“Do it. We might have used our resistance to make a comeback and then climbed up onto the world stage, but there are some who are trying to move ever forward to pull out ahead of us. This is hardly a new thought, but the world really is a constant competition.”

She felt the inner pressure inside her growing.

...I really might be the kind of politician that likes this kind of fighting.

But the other academies were also *like this*.

The large nations led the world and the small nations tried to put themselves out there and to survive.

Everyone was doing what they could to not be crushed.

...When Sanada attacked and sabotaged us before the Battle of Novgorod, they weren't just trying to destroy the Musashi and crush us. That was their way to make their presence known to the world as a small nation.

What they did would determine the value of the small nation of Sanada and of themselves. They had made their attack with that great pressure bearing down on them and they would again in the future.

There were plenty of other nations like that. And...

“We must not forget that we are taking on a superpower that has control of the majority of the world. We're trying to get a hit in to prevent them from

simply doing whatever they want. Today will be the beginning of that.”

“Then let’s send out the Musashi! Let’s show off! And I want to move the Ariake too! We opened the bottom to send the Musashi out before, so it’d be cool to open the top this time!”

“This boy...” muttered everyone, so Masazumi nodded.

“Can we do it?”

“I’ll make sure we can.” Neshinbara crossed his arms and grinned. “I’ll put together a strategy that’s guaranteed to make Houjou our friends.”

The afternoon wind blew across an aerial fleet marked with the name Houjou.

The Houjou fleet was protecting Edo Bay, the Tottori Castle which had arrived there, and the Azuchi Castle which was about to leave.

The battleship leading the fleet was the Hachioji Castle. Someone in white stood on the black galley’s deck.

The girl wore a white track suit with the “Sagami Houjou” logo on the back. She was an automaton with dark skin and a white horn on either side of her head.

She had a view horizontally out into the sky.

As she stood motionless above the sea to guard and monitor the area, she faced northwest.

“Ujinao-sama, the Ariake’s estimated location is 120 km in that direction.”

Houjou Ujinao nodded at the words of the ninja girl Mouse at her feet. Her eyes were closed, but she turned her head to face the Mouse.

“Kotarou, now is the time to prepare the shells and the mechanical phoenix unit. ...We will do exactly as Hashiba has instructed.”

“Are you sure?”

“Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Testament. You established a friendly relationship with Musashi at IZUMO

and your childhood friend is on the Musashi...or so I hear.”

“Testament,” said Ujinao with a nod. But she then opened a sign frame to display Hashiba’s instructions. She placed her hand on it and called in more information. “But, Kotarou, positions change with time.”

“Is there anything outside of one’s position?”

“There is.”

Ujinao was very clear about that. Next, she began to walk forward. She stopped on the very edge of the bow and faced the Ariake’s distant position in the sky. And...

“But your physical location can only be decided by your position. Just because you have certain feelings does not mean you can be by someone’s side, Kotarou. And it is because it comes with a fixed physical location that we call it our ‘position’.”

“What is your relationship with that person?”

“He is my ally. ...And I am his ally.”

“I-I am your ally too, Ujinao-sama!”

Kotarou’s words placed a small smile on Ujinao’s lips.

“Even if we are far apart, even if we are forever separated, and even if we are enemies.”

Listen.

“Our Houjou Association of Indian States teaches of death, rebirth, and transcendence. Everything will eventually meet destruction and it will be reborn through the process of transmigration. But to escape the suffering of that cycle is to transcend it and reach the pure land. That means life is constant suffering and you cannot escape it even in death due to transmigration.”

“That’s pretty harsh...”

“And that is why our teachings say people must reach enlightenment and transcend that cycle. But...”

But...

“What if there was someone who you could trust would forever be your ally even throughout transmigration?”

“Well...”

“What if you had someone who you could trust would remain your ally even if they are not by your side, even if you die, and even if they die?”

“That...that wouldn’t be possible. It’s nonsense.”

“It is possible. There are a few ways.” Ujinao placed her hands on the deck railing. “But in my case, it was a childhood promise.”

“Childhood...? Ujinao-sama, even your family and relatives betrayed you and turned on you while fighting over inheritance...”

“It happened in those very circumstances. And...that is why we promised to be each other’s allies ‘no matter what’. Perhaps it was a childish attempt to feel some peace and perhaps it was just something I wanted to hear myself say. And in my current position, I have you and everyone else as my allies. So...”

So...

“I am much more spoiled than I was in the past. So if he and I are still ‘allies’, then there is nothing to fear.”

Ujinao hit the “approve” mark on the sign frame.

She had authorized supplies for the armaments and she nodded with a small smile.

“Now, I wonder what the world is going to do.”

Chapter 9: Challenges of a Remodeled Place

CHAPTER 9

"Challengers of a Remodeled Place"



All of a sudden
What should have been fun
Was a pain

Point Allocation (Student Life)

All of a sudden

What should have been fun

Was a pain

Point Allocation (Student Life)

“Okay, get your butts moving! There’s danger in the air! Replenish the shells to make sure we can leave at any moment! If we get caught by the Azuchi this time, we need to be able to make them cry!”

The engine division chief’s voice reverberated across Okutama’s fore deck.

“Everyone, begin the night shift!!”

“Judge!!”

The Ariake was still full of motion even after nightfall.

The first port and starboard ships of Shinagawa and Asakusa were loaded with cargo and the surface derricks were lit up in preparation to transport the wooden containers that would pile up at night.

The second port and starboard ships of Tama and Murayama primarily contained diplomatic buildings and shopping districts. Other than the largescale ports that stuck out like wings, the lights were lowered to a level that only illuminated the crucial locations.

The third port and starboard ships of Takao and Oume were mostly residential and the streets and homes had their lights on for the people heading home from work or about to head out for work.

The front and back central ships of Musashino and Okutama were much the same.

Those two ships were primarily student housing and administrative buildings, so the lights were on but kept low enough to not disturb the night. And those lights filled the academy at the back of Okutama as well as the houses and streets.

That was Musashi Ariadust Academy.

The two school buildings, one in front and one in back, had occasional lights on in the hallways and classrooms and people were moving around within them even at night.

They were remodeling the interior.

“Hey, Crossunite, this is a hook for the ceiling plumbing. Can I throw it up to you? ...Judge. Now, Naruze, Naito, and Urquiaga, is the package for me still not here?”

The Student Council Room at the center of the front school building’s 3rd floor was working through the night.

Someone inside was walking to and fro and looking up and down with design plans on a sign frame.

“Masazumi, calm down a little. You told us to finish the maintenance here before we left, but you’re still wandering restlessly around. How about sitting down and actually getting the butt of your track suit dirty?”

That comment came from the track suit-wearing Weiss Hexen delivering some rolled-up paper through the window. And she spoke to the others inside.

“Naomasa is taking the big stuff to the lift down below. Adele and...someone else go grab it.”

“Judge! How about you, Satomi Student Council President?”

“Judge. Cutting string and tying up the packages here isn’t really helping anyone. I’ll go.”

“Wait,” said Noriki as he removed the packaging from a new bookcase. “Satomi Student Council President. You are good at cutting string and arranging the packages, so you stay there.”

“...Are you saying I had a hidden talent?”

“We can understand even if you don’t say it, so don’t bother. Yes, and tie up those newspapers.”

Adele tilted her head at all this.

“So, um, who am I supposed to go with then?”

“Futayo is training with the Tachibana Couple up top... Is the Aoi idiot not here?”

“Heh heh. He went to say hi to Asama Papa as thanks for getting him released from the guard station this morning.”

That was Kimi. She and Horizon (who was wearing a helmet) were carrying desk drawers out into the hallway and she suddenly turned toward Adele.

“Suzu is working at the bathhouse. ...So would you like me to go with you, Adele?”

“I will accompany you two,” added Horizon. “My gravitational control is sure to come in handy.”

“Take care of it,” said Masazumi to the three girls just before Kimi pulled on Adele’s hand and hopped out the window.

And a voice reached Masazumi from below the window and above the courtyard.

“Eh!? Ah! Kimi-san! Hwaaaaaaaaaaaaahh!!”

Horizon watched the voice go, gave a nod, and then hopped out the window herself. Another yell from below: “Eh!? Ah! Vicereine Horizon!? Owaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahh!!”

“Nice one! That upright falling pose will give you a nice landing, Horizon! You should try a drill spin next time!”

“My initial speed would likely be the key to that. I will give it my best shot.”

As the voices continued, Masazumi noticed Ookubo standing by the door and staring blankly inside.

“Oh? Is something the matter, Ookubo?”

“Um, uh, did someone just...? And Vicereine Horizon too? Um...”

“They win if you react. I recently realized those are the rules of the game. ... Oh, are those the documents from the engine division? I’ll have Tsukinowa scan them, so sit in the corner and wait.”

Just as Masazumi gave those instructions, a sign frame opened next to her face.

What could this be? wondered Masazumi as she looked over.

Gold Mar: “Um, Seijun, the Asama Shrine has some charms for placing on pipes. They say to go pick them up since they’re important.”

Asama: “They’re to negate the wind during combat. If you can’t stop by, should I bring them there?”

“Well,” hesitated Masazumi.

“No need,” said Naruze who was about to take off outside the window.

She brought her feather broom alongside the windowsill.

“This isn’t your first time riding one, right? I’ll take you to the Asama Shrine.”

“How will I get back?”

“Wait a bit and Urquiaga will be along.”

Gold Mar: “Oh, that’s right.”

“What does that mean?” wondered Masazumi.

Heidi looked up from where she was measuring out space under the floor and she placed a hand on her cheek.

“That would be because Narumi-san is working as a shrine maiden trainee starting today.”

“I’m not sure if that’s surprising or exactly what I would have expected...”

Masazumi stepped onto the windowsill and leaned outside.

“Um, Vice President?” asked Ookubo behind her.

“I’ll be taking a quick trip to the Asama Shrine. Leave the documents-...no, I’ll take them with me. I’ll probably have some down time waiting for my ride back. ...What’s that look for?”

“Nothing... See you later.”

“Judge,” said Masazumi as she sat on the back of the seat on Naruze’s broom.

The wind outside was the wind of the Ariake. It smelled of oil and steel.

In the courtyard below, Neshinbara was writing on a hanging banner. With all the official events around this time, they probably had to hold the hobby events at the same time.

As Masazumi wondered what the “Association of Wholesome Bachelors” was about, Naruze tilted her broom.

“Okay, let’s get going.”

Their bodies hopped upwards before she even finished speaking.

They flew into the Okutama sky.

Technohexen flight was achieved using speed.

Naruze’s initial speed was so great that she instantly arrived near the Ariake’s ceiling even with Masazumi along for the ride. She looked down at Musashi’s nightscape, but once she reached the top of her parabolic arc, she gradually slowed the broom.

The wind was only fast enough to gently stroke her cheeks.

...That should do it.

One’s flight speed felt very different to a normal person versus someone who was accustomed to it. When Naruze thought they were moving slow enough to speak, others tended not to agree. That was why she lowered her broom’s output until she felt they could whisper.

“Okay, Masazumi, I’ll be taking you to the Asama Shrine, but do you have something to say first?”

This was a bit of kindness.

“I’m sure you plan on striking at Azuchi and Houjou, but you have something else to worry about too, don’t you? ...That’s why you’re riding on my broom right now. Or am I wrong?”

“No, you’re right.”

Masazumi had leaned forward and half clung to the broom behind Naruze, so she sat up now.

“That part’s the thruster, so clinging to it is dangerous.”

“I just wish there was something to hold onto. ...But anyway.” Masazumi adjusted her track suit’s collar and sighed. “I did want a bit of a change of pace and there’s nothing wrong with holding a meeting for that, right?”

Flat Vassal: “So you were planning a war as a change of pace! That’s our Vice President!”

Unturning: “So the rumors were accurate...”

Uqui: “What do you think, Narumi? Not growing accustomed to it can be dangerous.”

10ZO: “Uqui-dono, Masazumi-dono did not develop into this kind of person because she wanted to...”

Marube-ya: “But the life you live shows what kind of person you are!!”

“Someone please reject that premise.”

“I don’t think anyone can,” said Naruze. “More importantly, you haven’t been eating much, have you? Asama asked the Chancellor to deliver an apple pie, so if holding a remote meeting here won’t cheer you up, why not head there right away?”

“No, um.” Masazumi opened a sign frame. “There are some things I don’t like talking about with all that commotion going on. ...I doubt we’ll have any more spies like the Sanada ones, but I still don’t like it.”

“You mean you’re more comfortable when it’s just between us?”

Not even Naruze knew if her quiet laugh was bitter or self-deprecating, but then she heard Masazumi speak.

“But I think all of you are turning into one of the greatest forces in the Far East. Politically, at least.”

“Say that when I’m with Margot. ...Besides, those P.A. Oda Edel Brocken testers picked a fight with us at Novgorod. Our rank can change at a moment’s

notice, so we can't let our guard down."

Naruze said "oh" and added something more.

"I'm not saying what you said upset me."

Hearing that, Masazumi initially gave her a casual look but finally smiled a little.

"Don't worry."

I shouldn't have said that, thought Naruze while feeling regret from the bottom of her heart.

"What's that 'I know that' look for?"

"Then what are we supposed to do?" Masazumi gave a smile void of displeasure, adjusted her position on the broom, and inhaled. "Hey, are you listening, Class 3-Plum Chancellor's Officers and Student Council? To continue from this morning, I would like to look a bit ahead and discuss our future policy as Musashi. This is separate from the battle with Azuchi or Houjou that is sure to happen today. I want to check on a small problem that Musashi faces in the near future."

Namely...

"We haven't finished our official school events."

"The academy rules prioritize school activities over politics and war. I want to do something about this before the Testament Union says something about it and turns it into a political issue."

As Masazumi spoke, she sensed the empty air below her legs dangling from the broom.

...I really have gotten used to life here.

With that thought, she continued.

"Now, let's start with the current situation."

She opened a sign frame that displayed a schedule. They were currently entering the latter half of July, but...

Vice President: “This would normally be when the end-of-term exams are returned, but we only just barely finished our midterm exams on the way back.”

Smoking Girl: “Yeah, that was pretty awful.”

Vice President: “There’s no helping it. The Testament Union was pointing to the academy rules and threatening to punish us if we continued engaging in war without functioning as an academy.”

Novice: “And thanks to that, we’re working through our 1st term events, right?”

“Right,” responded Masazumi.

Vice President: “We don’t have to worry about the Spring School Festival because we held that with England, but we haven’t done the Gagaku Festival that should have been held at Aki. We’ll be able to use the school building this week, so we can work through the health examination and other events that kind of fell by the wayside with the Battle of Mikawa. That way the Testament Union can’t place an Event Stop on us.”

Bell: “Event...Stop?”

Wise Sister: “An Event Stop!! Heh heh. I think we all know what an Event Stop is!^[1] Sumo stomp!! In other words, because the academy hasn’t completed its events, we can’t be students. So all our political, wartime, and other activities with other nations will be stopped with an Event Stop!”

Almost Everyone: “I’m having a hard time figuring out if you’re giving a serious answer or not!!”

Asama: “It actually all fits with the correct interpretation.”

Mal-Ga: “And what would the incorrect interpretation be?”

Asama: “Eh? U-um, I don’t knowwww. I really doooooon’t.”

Novice: “To get back on topic, an Event Stop is an effective defensive measure for small nations. While they’re being attacked, they can stall their official events and demand a ceasefire ‘to finish their official events’ if they need to. ... *Of course, if they do that, the Testament Union will strip them of their rights as an academy.*”

Gold Mar: “Besides, if they use their events as a shield like that, the Testament Union will intervene as soon as they’re done and dismantle the academy’s leadership.”

Bell: “Will that...happen to...us too?”

Vice President: “We’re completing our events to make sure it doesn’t.”

This is a unique aspect of the academy rules, thought Masazumi. This rule had been created by the provisional rule, but while it meant you did not qualify as human if you were not a student, it also meant that the students had to remain students.

The large nations would manage their schedule so they could progress through their history recreation while also completing their official events.

The European Tsirhc Catholics and the Kantou nations had plenty of winter festivals and celebrations, so scheduling could be difficult but they only had to check on their progress periodically. Conversely, the Protestants had few celebrations, but...

...It’s apparently a really big deal if they carelessly forget or put off an event...

Did that mean they needed to make it at least somewhat habitual? However...

Vice President: “The school trip is the real problem. I had originally wanted to hold it immediately after Magdeburg, but we lost our opportunity. That event and its preparations are a lot of work.”

Righteousness: “There’s nothing I can do about that, 3rd years.”

Asama: “Oh, you probably don’t know, Yosh-chan, but the Musashi flies near where the school trip is being held, so you’re doomed to take part too.”

Righteousness: “I don’t like the way you phrased that!!”

Vice President: “Well, after Novgorod and tonight, the Musashi will probably need retuning. It would be best to use the school trip to do that and hold a test flight.”

Silver Wolf: “Oh, I just got back from carrying some things up from below. Are we having another meeting? Tomo, can you send me the chat log?”

Masazumi sighed and she watched on her sign frame as Asama complied from the Asama Shrine.

Every nation had to complete or use the official events. It was a politician's duty to keep those things running smoothly.

...You could call these national events.

People were sure to call them a waste of money and say they had more important things to worry about, but the events held by a nation demonstrated the nation's individuality and allowed them to line up alongside the other nations.

By holding the same events as another nation, your nation could share the same values.

Allied and friendly nations would sometimes adopt traditions they could understand.

...Christmas and Valentines are two examples of that.

The word "international" came to mind.

Vice President: "But the biggest event of all will arrive after all those different events."

That being...

Vice President: "Summer break."

10ZO: "Yes, that one is a problem."

Tenzou was handling the piping above the Student Council Room ceiling.

Scarred: "Is there something difficult about summer break?"

10ZO: "Judge. During summer break, nearly all academy functions come to a standstill. That means it is impossible to function outside of the bare minimum required to run the nation."

Mal-Ga: "Judge. That's why the academies use that time to make progress on their internal history recreation. Battles and research in the fields of culture and civilization require long periods of stability, so summer break and winter break

tend to lead to increases in those fields. ...We have a lot of hobby events during the summer, but that isn't just because we love festivals."

Marube-ya: "On the commerce side, domestic demand rises during those times, so we use it to make lots of money. Because all the students are back home, you see."

Smoking Girl: "Since there are so many people in the cities and so many festivals, it's a busy time for the engine division too. Asama-chi, it's the same for you, isn't it?"

Asama: "Eh? Well, it's about the same as always for us."

Almost Everyone: "That confidence...!"

Me: "No, it gets pretty busy at your place, Asama. I can tell when I go there as a part-time shrine maiden. There's so much work to do with cleaning the *mikoshi* and tuning the festival grounds and everything. But that means no one notices my crossdressing, which is boring."

Hori-ko: "I will hit him for the crossdressing part later, so fear not, everyone. ...But he is right. I saw a great many things in the city last year, but I recall seeing shrine maidens moving here and there throughout the city. To sum up, I believe Asama-sama was merely being humble."

About what I expected from them... thought Mitotsudaira atop one of the periodic transport ships heading from the Ariake diplomatic port to Okutama.

Asama: "No, um, uhh..."

Asama was used to being busy, so it was true that she was confident.

On the other hand, it was true she would be busy, so Mitotsudaira's king and Horizon were also correct.

She had to smile at Asama's panicked text scrolling along the sign frame, but she needed to address the topic that had her attention.

It had to do with the sight she had seen outside.

Silver Wolf: "Perhaps because summer is coming, a lot of Date and Mogami

trade ships have been visiting the Ariake.”

A Mogami ship had arrived almost immediately after the Musashi had returned. A Date one had arrived soon thereafter, Sviet Rus had arrived via Mogami, and other nations had followed.

Mitotsudaira had visited her territory below today to greet some people and pass on some information. She had expected the Mito sky to be full of activity, but due to the Ariake’s giant stealth barrier, she had only seen a surprisingly clear sky.

Silver Wolf: “With more ships arriving, the rainfall issues caused by the Ariake’s immobility are turning into a problem.”

Vice President: “Once our individual trade discussions with the European nations have settled down, we’ll have to send the Musashi out as a hub port and move the Ariake toward the ocean while it’s free.”

The transport ship finished its ascent. It now moved horizontally from Shinagawa’s starboard bow and toward Okutama’s bow.

Masazumi was somewhere in the distance overhead, but she could not see her from here. She could not detect her scent either because the smells of oil and scorched metal were stronger.

...These conditions are part of the reason I didn’t notice that Sanada was infiltrating us.

Mitotsudaira reminded herself to be on her guard as she looked to the unseen south.

Edo was in that direction.

We need to retake that city eventually, she thought as Masazumi’s words scrolled by next to her face.

Vice President: “This is all because summer break is approaching. Date and Mogami apparently want a clear idea of what their trade routes are before then. That will act as a springboard for the surface trade route that will come later.”

As Masazumi spoke, a heavy noise rumbled from the starboard side of the

Ariake's ceiling.

It was...

Bell: "The Nanbu clan ship...is leaving..."

Marube-ya: "That's the ship of the Oushuu Clans Alliance that Shiro-kun was negotiating with. I think he gave them some souvenirs and asked them to weigh us against Hashiba in Edo."

Hori-ko: "How did that turn out, Heidi-sama?"

Marube-ya: "Judge. Any food or minerals would be taken away by their higher ups, so we had Musashi IZUMO sell them some of Kantou IZUMO's engine-related tech. Oushuu might be skilled at constructing residences and fortresses, but they're a little weak when it comes to aerial ships."

"I see," said Mitotsudaira as Okutama came into view. It had a lot of lights on because it was the central ship that handled the fuel and power distribution for the other ships. According to Naomasa, they had fixed a few flaws found during the Battle of Novgorod, but they still had to make some readjustments for the feedback from the other ships. It was apparently a pain to deal with.

...We need to finish Okutama's maintenance before leaving on the school trip, don't we?

As she thought about that, a familiar smell reached her nose: apples.

They were cooked and the smell reached her through a chimney.

It was an apple pie and she only knew two people who could bake them like this: the Blue Thunder's manager and...

...My king.

But when her king made it, the lemon scent was weaker. She was conceitedly confident that that might be out of concern for her, but this was exactly that smell.

Silver Wolf: "My king, are you cooking?"

Hori-ko: "He should be delivering what Asama-sama asked for."

Asama: "Oh, yes. He came here. He wanted to say thank you for helping him

out of the guard station this morning and my dad is researching the Musashi's defensive divine protections, so I ordered a pie for everyone here to share over tea. He might be playing a video game with my dad. Do you want to stop by and see?"

"Judge," said Mitotsudaira as the Asama Shrine came into view. She also saw the academy beyond it. The area was still dark, but the schoolyard and surrounding paths were lit up.

And she saw a few people cutting diagonally across to the port side of the schoolyard.

...Huh? Kimi, Adele, and Horizon?

Kimi lightly jumped over a chest-high fence at the border of the academy schoolyard.

"That should do it."

She was headed toward the elevated platform on the port side of the academy. There was a delivery elevator there. The elevator was large enough to carry a wide block section if it was divided into thirds, but it was not yet in view. However, it would be carrying the bookcases and desks that Naomasa had carried in from the port.

As a shortcut, Kimi had jumped over the academy fence.

She made a light leap. She gently kicked her toes off the top of the fence, spun her body around, and turned backwards in midair.

"C'mon, you two. Hurry it up."

First, Adele ran toward the fence and tried to use it as a stepping stone. She had a body reinforcement spell instead of an acceleration spell as a constant divine protection and that spell circle appeared on the back of her neck.

Is she going to clear it? wondered Kimi.

"Ah, no, huh!?"

Her foot seemed to hesitate. As a result, she frantically stepped down too

hard and jumped not just over the fence but well past it.

“Um, that’s a cliff right there.”

“Awah! No, no, no!!”

They were on a narrow plaza at the top of the cliff. Adele reached out with her track suit sleeves and grabbed at the thick branch of a cherry tree. The tree bent, but it did not break.

Adele breathed a relieved sigh as she dangled from the branch. Meanwhile...

“Horizon.”

Horizon made a great leap.

She passed over Kimi’s head, but it was a high jump that did not take her far horizontally.

She spread her arms in midair and pulled her knees up.

“...!”

With a scraping of gravel, she landed heavily on one knee and one hand.

Kimi landed on her toes next to her just as Urquiaga flew by overhead, carrying some cargo.

Uqui: “Why does Horizon always have to put some much of an ‘oomph’ into her actions?”

Hori-ko: “Because it is cool. Obviously.”

Horizon slowly stood up and began walking.

Kimi walked alongside her.

...This is a nice atmosphere given war is a very real possibility.

“Heh heh.”

...I wonder what it is we immerse ourselves in at times like this.

This may have been an extension of their victorious mood.

Next to Kimi, Adele took a drink from a bamboo water bottle and gave Kimi a

puzzled look.

But, thought Kimi, leaving the crucial words in her heart.

...What's wrong with that?

After giving freedom to her heart, Kimi spoke to the princess walking alongside her.

"Horizon."

"What is it, Kimi-sama?"

"Well." Kimi voiced the words she had just thought up. "You said my foolish brother would show you your dreams, but I think we're the same too."

Even she thought this was sudden.

But it was a lot like thinking up song lyrics. These were the words that suddenly left her when they filled her heart.

"That just occurred to me."

"Are you saying you wish to be with me?" asked Horizon.

"I'm not sure how I should put it," said Kimi. "But I hope we can all share your and my foolish brother's dreams."

"Judge." Horizon nodded. "So you will share Toori-sama and me with everyone. That sounds like a good time for girls and boys alike."

Adele spat out her water.

"Are you okay, Adele-sama? You have small water tanks, so you mustn't force yourself."

"Wh-what are you talking about!? Water isn't stored in your breasts; it's stored in your bla-...oh, that was too close! I nearly turned into Asama-san there! A near miss for Adele Balfette!"

"Now, now." Kimi stopped her and placed a hand on Horizon's shoulder. "Umm, not even I meant it that way. As for the boys, we can leave that to Naruze's imagination. Let's try to keep this a little less exciting, okay?"

"Judge. I would prefer that as well."

Kimi nodded, said “judge”, and patted Horizon’s shoulder.

“Don’t forget that.”

The nighttime lights illuminated the cherry trees in front of the school. The leaves were green and had faded somewhat in the summer air. Kimi looked over at them and then spoke.

“This is such a happy atmosphere, isn’t it?”

Horizon lifted her nose toward the air.

“Sniff, sniff, sniff! ...You mean this? So this is the smell of happiness, Kimi-sama!”

“Sniff, sniff, sniff! ...Yes, this. That’s right, Horizon!”

Adele spread her mouth horizontally, but they ignored her. Kimi gave the other two a light shove forward and took the lead herself.

That was when a dull sound reached them from the sky. The Date and Mogami trade ships were leaving the Ariake’s external port.

Wise Sister: “A lot of ships are leaving today. Probably because of all the dangerous talk.”

Tenzou read Kimi’s words as he descended from the ceiling after finishing the maintenance there.

...It is true things will likely get dangerous with Houjou.

Now, then, he thought as he hopped down into the Student Council Room, which still had its door wide open. Noriki was putting together a bookcase next to the entrance.

That boy’s family had originally been important members of Houjou. Tenzou had heard he had moved to Musashi when he was little to avoid the commotion over the heir to the main family.

And afterwards, his father had committed suicide.

Tenzou had to wonder why and had to think that only caused more problems, but this was the age they lived in. *My own father causes a lot of problems.* But

Noriki's father had been the link between the main Houjou family and his own family, so he may have been able to demonstrate something and protect something through his actions.

Tenzou felt like he understood:

...His father probably committed suicide to sever their connection to Houjou.

When Noriki himself had been reunited with Houjou Ujinao, he had refused to return to Houjou and he had not discussed it before or since.

He belonged to Musashi.

That meant that both questioning him and speaking to him about Houjou would be equally meaningless.

Yes, thought Tenzou in a nod of understanding only he comprehended.

Mal-Ga: "Asama, I'll be descending to the shrine soon, so is the area open?"

Asama: "Eh!? W-wait, you and Masazumi are coming here!?"

Vice President: "Hm? We can see you from above. Naruze just finished registering for an overhead entrance through the defense barrier."

What is this about? wondered Tenzou as Asama's words raced across his sign frame.

Asama: "I-I'm sorry! Everyone, be careful! Toori-kun was messing with the defense spells while playing with my dad!"

Tenzou tilted his head at the string of text that suddenly appeared next to his face. Everyone else in the room did the same, but he spoke on their behalf.

10ZO: "Which defense spell?"

Asama: "Oh, um, it's a conditional action restriction spell. The Musashi now has a restriction spell in place that allows spies in but prevents them from doing any actual spying, right? If that spell is set too strictly, it can really restrict our actions, so we have it pretty loose...but as the shrine for all of Musashi, that falls under our jurisdiction."

Gold Mar: "What about it? What did the Chancellor do?"

Asama: “Well, he was really hitting it off with my dad who was updating the spell, you see. Then my dad decided that doing something weird every so often would make for good practice, you see. And Shinto isn’t very picky, you see. So, um...”

Me: “Okay, let’s try this out to train for doing things with a restriction spell in place. Are you ready, everyone!?”

“Huh? Um, Toori-dono?”

The spell was activated.

- **Restriction Defense Spell Updated <Condition Change: Accepted: Change Contents: Uzume-type – 5 Minutes>**
- **Restriction Defense Spell Contents <You cannot speak without saying something that sounds dirty.>**
- **Hanami: “For the next 5 minutes, any forced attempt to speak will cause you to say a dirty word. Clap?”**

All of the Musashi fell silent.

The trade negotiations, conversations, and lectures underway across the ship all came to a stop.

“...!?”

Everyone read the sign frame that appeared next to their face and thought that same thing.

...Damn him!!

“———!!”

Asama spotted Toori tiptoeing out the back of the main shrine building, so she raised her voice. But...

“...!!”

The restriction kept her from speaking. Toori tilted his head toward her in his shrine maiden outfit. He then twisted his body around, and...

“Booby trap. ...Huh? What’s the matter, Asama? You aren’t mad at me? Huh, huh? Can you not even say ‘hit’ like you normally do?”

Why you... she thought, but when she opened her mouth...

“Secret gard-...”

A strange term nearly escaped her mouth, so she quickly shut it.

...Wah!

She was a shrine maiden. One of her daily substitutions was to not casually say any impure words. That was supposed to be a substitution she could keep by being self-aware, but...

“Mille crepe. Oh, just to be clear, you’ll find yourself saying something you don’t mean to if you speak without thinking, so be careful. Sis made the foundation of this last night as a joke, but your dad thought it sounded like a great idea. He said he was glad to hear someone so young was interested in Shinto.”

Asama felt her blood pressure rising for a number of reasons. She would scold her father later. Scold him severely.

But...

Silver Wolf: “...!”

Mal-Ga: “In and out. ...Oh, so that’s what you have to do? That’s pretty annoying.”

Was it just their class that had such a clear division between the people who adjusted quickly and the people who adjusted slowly?

Silver Wolf: “Sexy...”

<That is not going to cut it: By, god.>

...Shinto is really strict!

Now that I think about it, Shinto has a lot of incest and it’s full of gods who give birth to children just by passing each other by, realized Asama.

Anyway, she thought as she took a deep breath to lower her body temperature and then lightly slapped her cheeks. That cooled her heart.

“—————”

Asama expressionlessly glared down at the idiot in front of her.

The idiot briefly wavered from the intensity of her gaze, but then...

“Honey jelly. ...Oh? Oh? You wanna fight? You wanna fight? I-I might not look it, but I’ve been learning some standing throws.”

She averted her gaze as he began some shadow slapping against an invisible opponent.

Asama opened a sign frame and called up the inter-shrine databank to search for historical Shinto spell countermeasures.

“Accessing Impure Dictionary: Accepted: Referencing and Synching with Dictionary for List of Speakable Words: Accepted.”

Hanami fidgeted worriedly on her head, but she did not care. She had to prepare for the purge.

Now, then, she said in her heart.

“Mountain access. ...So what would you like me to do with you, Toori-kun?”

“Period. Huh, huh? Why are you handling this calmly? How is that fair?”

“Revealing. ...This level of restriction spell has happened...well, several times in Shinto history, so we have a list of acceptable words. Oh, and the terms I am using are officially approved by IZUMO, so they don’t count as impure for me to say them.”

“Rotary engine. ...Eh? How is that any fun?”

“Shimenawa. ...If you think I should begin the Kiyomasa Show here, press the button now.”

<Results. For: 98006, Against: 1>

“Tightrope. ...Oh, what’s this? It would seem only the person right in front of me was against it.”

Silver Wolf: “Cream sauce. ...U-um, Tomo? You’re starting to scare me...”

Vice President: “Political intercourse. ...So you’re saying she needs to be more scare-ful how she acts?”

Almost Everyone: “Ehh...?”

Vice President: “Erection of Cottages Act 1588. ...W-wait. Why wasn’t that restricted!?”

Mal-Ga: “Censored. ...My guess is the god felt that had to be said.”

Silver Wolf: “Manhole. Poor thing...”

Hmm, thought Asama with a nod.

...Looks like even our god is going easy on them.

She decided to rethink a number of things and then looked to the idiot who was trying to sneak away.

“Pillar festival.C’mon, don’t run away. I’ll have to subdue you as the Shinto Representative.”

“Outrage of Anagni.^[2] Hold on. Do you really think Shinto is down with that? ...Huh?”

“Fertility festival. ...Ah, hey. If you try to weasel your way out of this-...”

Asama followed Toori’s gaze just in case and saw something there.

Mary was walking from the shrine’s waiting room with a smile and a tray of sweets.

...Oh, no!!

Mary was originally Catholic, but she had become a primarily Shinto musician since moving in with Tenzou. She could not reject a Shinto spell right now. And...

...This spell makes you say something dirty if you speak without thinking!

I need to scold Kimi, thought Asama as she predicted what was about to happen. And that led her to another thought: ...If we make Mary-san say

something weird here, it's sure to become an international incident!

Mary's sister was fairly politically powerful, so that was entirely possible. And if they shamed a foreign royal, it would also shame the Asama Shrine, Musashi, and the Far East.

So Asama opened her mouth to warn Mary.

"Yellow River Delta!"

<From Asama Shrine to Contractor Asama Tomo: Warning: That was pretty good, but it was too forced. To make up for it, you will lose one Blessing.>

...Nwaahhh!! Goddamn Shinto!

But before she could speak under the restriction, Mary opened her mouth.

It's all over, thought Asama as Mary smiled and held up the tray.

"I have some apple pie. ^[3] Would you like some?"

"————"

...That was good enough!? That was really good enough!?

<That was perrrrrfect: By, god.>

Ehhh? she protested in her heart as Mary placed the tray on the edge of the water station. She then carried over a plate with a slice of pie.

"It was hard and slippery on the inside, which made it difficult to cut, but I managed well enough. Now, please have some."

After handing over the plate, she smiled.

"It has thick cream inside...yes, it's custard actually, but I was a little surprised because something like compote is the standard back in England. ...Is something the matter?"

"Love festival. ...Well, um, I was just noticing you didn't have to say anything in particular to speak."

Mary clearly did not understand what Asama meant as she returned to the tray and poured some tea while singing to herself.

That seemed terribly dangerous to Asama, but she heard an English folk song:

“♪Pussy cat, pussy cat, where have you been~?”

So Shinto is accepting of foreign languages, realized Asama before gasping and looking forward.

Toori was gone.

“Holy tree nectar. ...Ah, he got away! Wh-where did that walking Far Eastern crisis get off to!?”

Flat Vassal: “If anything, wouldn’t the Chancellor be running and crawling instead of walking? And Asama-san?”

“Year of the cock. ...Eh? What is it, Adele?”

Flat Vassal: “It’s been 5 minutes, so you don’t need the leading term.”

When she heard that, Asama finally felt the blood rush to her head and fell to her knees. She started wondering where Kimi, one of the causes of this commotion, was right now.

Things are always so eventful around my king, thought Mitotsudaira with a bitter smile as she descended to the port.

Okutama’s bow was usually a large open space of deck, so it was being used as a port during the remodeling inside the Ariake.

Cargo was split between shipments to Okutama itself and shipments being sent to the ships to the port and starboard. The former was loaded onto large carts pulled by light gods of war and the latter was reloaded onto small transport ships and taken to the appropriate ships.

She listened to the sounds of that process, but...

...*Huh?*

She sensed an odd motion below her feet.

It came from below, but it was not the deck she stood on or the Musashi.

“This is...”

It was the air. A chilly movement of air reached her even through the stealth

barrier.

It reminded her of something.

...The pressure on the air when the Musashi takes off.

Of course, the Musashi was not taking off. So if this pressure was reaching the night sky...

“Warning from the 5th Special Duty Officer of the Chancellor’s Officers!!”

As soon as she yelled into a divine transmission, 3 large sign frames appeared inside the Ariake.

They appeared on the bow, center, and aft of the Ariake’s ceiling. Smaller ones also appeared here and there, but they all displayed a slender-faced automaton.

She was “Ariake” and she bowed.

“Good evening everyone. This is ‘Ariake’. ...Now, I have a not-good observation and a bad observation. Which would you like to hear first? Over.”

Mitotsudaira pressed the <Not-Good Observation> button on the sign frame that appeared in front of her.

“Ariake” checked the result of the vote on the sign frame that appeared next to her face.

“I see.” She nodded. “Either one would have been fine, but I have determined that you are all taking this seriously. Very well, I shall begin with the not-good observation. But first...”

Something appeared on the sign frame in front of Mitotsudaira.

“Congratulations. The winner of the drawing was Mitotsudaira-sama. You will be given a special coupon for the summer event!”

Silver Wolf: “What is this?”

Mal-Ga: “Ah! Half off!? If you don’t want it, give it to me! Those exhibition events are expensive, so I need any discount I can get.”

I suppose that’s fine, thought Mitotsudaira as “Ariake” continued speaking.

“We have observed lights in the Edo region. Based on the movement of the air and the ether pattern, I have determined the Quasi-Bahamut Aerial Warship Azuchi Castle is leaving port. Also...”

Also...

“Houjou has appeared from the south-southwest with several aerial warships which are ascending to a higher altitude. Based on our observations, their bows are pointed in our direction. An attack from Houjou is incoming...5, 4, 3, 2, 1. It was a direct hit. Over.”

A rumbling came from the Ariake’s starboard bow and the pillars inside the ship shook.

...Houjou!?

“Masazumi was working so hard to go to war with them and they started it instead!?”

Vice President: “I didn’t want war! I only wanted to make an attack that let us say we ‘supported Mouri’!”

Me: “Isn’t that longer explanation just more confusing?”

Mitotsudaira wholeheartedly agreed.

The cargo transportation work came to a halt around her and everyone began fixing the cargo and ships to the deck. The ships in the center of the deck were moved to the side as they either had the smaller ships make emergency landings or prepared the Musashi to leave port.

This would ensure that they could leave port at full power at any time.

And it was not just the students working. Even Musashi’s normal citizens had trained for this since the Battle of Mikatagahara.

They could fight. No, everyone was immediately preparing the ship to fight.

And so Mitotsudaira spoke to them all.

“We’re counting on you!”

“Judge!!”

The transport ship crew shouted back to her. A few of them must have been

from Mito because...

“Victory to the Mito Lord and natto!”

“Victory to the Mito Lord and natto...!”

You don't all have to repeat that.

But when the next rumbling and alarms sounded, Mitotsudaira recalled what Masazumi had said earlier: their next war would likely be fought against Houjou. But...

“Don't tell me...”

Mitotsudaira ran from Okutama's bow and toward the Asama Shrine while the lights were shut off for better ether management. She accelerated her body toward her king's location.

“Is Houjou making a preemptive strike because they predicted Masazumi would eventually declare war on them!?”

Vice President: “What do you mean by that!?”

She continued running while seeing her king's quip about victory going to he who acts first.

The next rumbling impact seemed to push her body away from the bow.

Chapter 10: Responder in a Sky of Beginning

CHAPTER 10

"Responder in a Sky of Beginning"

Raise your hand in greeting
How much strength
Is needed to do that?
Point Allocation (Cannon Fire)



Raise your hand in greeting

How much strength

Is needed to do that?

Point Allocation (Cannon Fire)

Fog appeared in the night sky above Kantou's eastern coast.

It was an immense amount of fog shaped much like a wave. It blew from the eastern ocean to the western mountains as it washed over the plane of the sky.

The wind and fog wave brought *something* into view in the sky, but it did not show itself to anything on the same level or below.

It used a stealth barrier. While it was normally a thin and broad cube, the top face had been removed. The stealth barrier had become a giant square bowl that contained a massive structure.

The giant white armored surface on the top was printed with the letters ARIAKE.

Large forms were moving across that surface while the light of the two moons washed over them.

They were heavy gods of war, around a dozen in all.

The unit carried god of war sniper rifles and telescopes that functioned as an observation system. By getting down on the southwestern end of the Ariake's rooftop, they could view the outside sky while remaining almost entirely hidden by the stealth barrier.

And shells were incoming.

The observation team watched the southwest direction and sent a divine transmission to the Ariake.

"Observation 2, 3, and 4 are sending in separate readings. Use the 3 data points to work out the enemy location!"

A few of the shells hit even as they spoke. They accurately struck the Ariake.

A tremor ran through it and the scaffolding used to replace external armor fell away.

“Ariake to Mito. Incinerating objects falling toward residential districts. Over.”

With that, fire appeared in the sky below the Ariake.

The hardened bamboo used for the scaffolding split, scattered, and fell once it was ignited. There were 21 pieces, but the fire burned into cinders as it fell.

“Incineration complete. Over.”

After the report from “Ariake”, the giant structure began to move.

The Ariake moved out to sea. At the same time, new movement occurred on the Ariake’s stern.

The Oushuu ships docked there began preparations to leave port. They used the Ariake’s giant form as a shield while it moved out to sea. And once the Ariake stopped...

“Opening stern stealth barrier in blow mode. Density: 500. Over.”

A mist-type stealth barrier enveloped the ships on the stern. It spread far behind the Ariake, extended northward, and ultimately dissolved into the night air.

This was wide-area stealth to let the Oushuu ships safely escape.

The Ariake secured that escape route as it continued out to sea.

As it did, the wind started blowing up at it from below.

The chilly mountain wind rose into the sky as it was taken in by the warm ocean. The wavering wind buffeted the Ariake’s stealth barrier from below, but also sent in a mist that helped hide it. But...

“More shells incoming! Even more than last time! They’re firing continuously!”

The roar of approaching shellfire pierced the night.

“They’re physical shells! They have acceleration divine protections, but they

aren't homing!"

The observation team received data from the Ariake. The sign frames next to the gods of war's face devices informed them that the Azuchi Castle had begun to rise in Edo and that the Houjou fleet was gradually approaching from the southwest. However...

"They're here!"

The shells accurately struck the Ariake.

More of the scaffolding on the outer surface fell away and the white armor panels bent.

The elevated wind, which included the sea air from below, caught on the bent armor and sounded something like a crying voice. And...

"Again!"

6 shots produced sparks and intense sounds.

And they were almost all hitting the same spot.

The sniper team aimed their weapons, but the distance was still too great.

"Damn, their aim is good! We're moving out to sea and they can still hit us from there!?"

"The Association of Indian States is the nation of arithmetic. They can probably calculate out our trajectory and position."

7 shots arrived. And once again...

"The same spot! The tension gathers in the corners, so if they collapse, it'll start a chain reaction!"

"Hey! Someone act as a shield! Someone other than me!"

"Can't Ariake put up a defense barrier?!"

"Not while in stealth mode. The defense barrier could interfere with the stealth and strip it away!"

"Wouldn't it be better to strip away our stealth if it gave us some defense!?"

"We can't do that while the Oushuu ships are still behind us!"

“...Then can we only sit here and watch!?”

“No,” said one of them. “Let’s call the vassal!”

“That’s right!” they all agreed as 5 shots scored direct hits.

They cried out as the sound of impact shook the air and an armor panel finally fell away. The 20-meter piece of white armor sounded like a scream as it sliced through the air on the way down toward the ocean.

“Primary armor detached! A chain reaction of detachment is possible on the southwest!”

The wind roared from the damaged area.

The secondary armor below was made to scatter in an impact, so it was weak to direct hits.

But then a noise arrived there. It was a low-speed physical shell with its acceleration managed by a spell.

It was going to hit. But just before it did...

“Go back!”

A female voice rang out and a projectile shot through between the gods of wars.

It was a spell shell.

The eyes of everyone atop the Ariake followed the attack that passed between them and approached the enemy.

Its aim was clear. Its path took it directly toward the Houjou fleet.

That fleet was obviously much too far to reach, but the shot did collide with the incoming volley of shells.

“Oh...!?”

A defense barrier flower blossomed in the sky.

It was not one of the Ariake’s defense barriers. The spell circle that opened was marked with the Asama Shrine seal.

It had been built into the spell shell and it had been activated when fired.

The one barrier caught the 6 incoming shells and shattered.

The night sky was lit up by sparks and by fragments of the ether forming the spell circle.

“That was a gravitational defense barrier shell for stealth barrier support. It’s called Hedge Camellia. It’s pretty useful for cannon battles at this range.”

The girl’s voice belonged to someone approaching the southwest of the roof with heavy footsteps.

A red and black female heavy god of war held a rifle. And on Jizuri Suzaku’s shoulder...

“Boss Naomasa!”

“You’re supposed to call me 6th Special Duty Officer at times like this.”

Behind her, several light gods of war were carrying spell shells lined up in wooden containers.

Naomasa pointed back at them and spoke to everyone.

“Sniper team, hurry up and load your ammo! Back at HQ, they’re examining Houjou’s movements and Hashiba’s movements. Until they decide on a course of action...”

Red light appeared in the sky where Houjou was.

They were firing.

Jizuri Suzaku responded by getting down on its right knee and raising its sniper rifle.

Naomasa spoke while returning fire.

“Everyone, fight back!”

“Houjou is attacking? What does that meant?”

In the air within the Ariake, Masazumi crossed her arms in response to Mary’s question.

“I think they made a few different political decisions. The Azuchi Castle’s response is proof of that.

She and Mary were riding on Urquiaga’s back as he took them from the Asama Shrine.

They were on their way to the academy. Up ahead, Naruze was carrying the crossdresser on her broom.

The idiot would occasionally wrap his legs around the broom handle and hang down to swing like a pendulum before righting himself again. When Urquiaga saw that...

Uqui: “Naruze, you can drop him if you want.”

Mal-Ga: “And you can shoot him if you want.”

Uqui: “I’ll take you up on that offer.”

Eh? thought Masazumi as Urquiaga fired a blast of air from his arm and into the dangling idiot’s back.

“Oh.” Mary’s eyebrows rose. “Is that a miniature dragon cannon?”

“It is a compressed air cannon. I used this to confess to Narumi.”

“My.”

“Hey, wait!” shouted Masazumi. “Are you saying you fired a combat technique!?”

But just as the compressed air was going to hit the idiot, he slid to the side. Naruze pushed at the broom with her butt so they slipped to the right.

Mal-Ga: “Hahn. ...You suck.”

Uqui: “Whose side are you on?”

Vice President: “Whose side are *you* on!?”

Mal-Ga: “Ha ha. ...But this reminds me of when we used to train together.”

Uqui: “That broom of yours has always been a pain. It’s flat, so it can move horizontally way too quickly.”

Marube-ya: “Oh, what’s this? Miss Narumi? If you’d like to know more about

this, money can buy you all the information you could want.”

Unturning: “No, thanks. I already washed clean my past regrets. Anything that happened before then is unimportant.”

Girls: “Ohhh...”

But when Naruze stuck her butt out to swiftly return to her original course...

“Oh?”

The reversal was too much for the idiot, his clutching legs slipped from the broom, and he fell into the air in front of the academy.

Seeing that, Masazumi opened a sign frame and told herself to stay focused on what mattered.

“Okay, let’s double check the current situation.”

In front of the academy, Kimi, Horizon, Adele, and Persona-kun gathered the items brought in from the lift.

They would normally remove the fence in front of the entrance bridge and carry everything into the schoolyard on a large cart, but they did not have the time. As the sounds of shellfire reached them, they tied the cart to the fence with rope.

“Adele, I’m sure there’s a post for you, so get going. The people taking the hits up above are sending requests for you.”

“I really don’t like the sound of that. ...Okay, this is fixed in place, so I’ll be going!”

“Judge,” said Kimi as a sign frame appeared next to her face. It was from Masazumi.

Vice President: “I would like to speak about the current situation.”

Hori-ko: “Excuse me, Masazumi-sama, but we are currently dealing with some luggage.”

Horizon gestured like she was lifting something up in her arms.

At that very moment, the crossdresser fell into those arms.

“Oh, welcome back,” said Kimi as Horizon braced herself against the weight.

“Nh...! No, never mind. This is too much of a burden on my joints.”

She detached her arms at the shoulders and the crossdresser’s remaining momentum slammed him into the ground.

It made an awful sound.

“Owwwww! W-with that timing and transition, wouldn’t you normally catch me!? Tenzou and Koni-tan both did it! Pe-yan! You carry me instead! Princess carry me!”

While Persona-kun frantically shook his head and hands, Kimi collected Horizon’s arms.

...Oh, these are pretty heavy.

They were heavy enough to feel more comfortable holding them in both hands. They were still warm and she could tell they would continue in autonomous mode for a while still.

Kimi wanted to open the collar of Horizon’s somewhat disheveled track suit, but her hands were full holding Horizon’s arms.

Then the arms she held bent at the elbow and opened the collar with their hands.

“Heh heh. How dexterous.”

“I practice on a daily basis. ...My goal is to have them make breakfast while I am still asleep. They can brew tea and bring me the snack jar while I am reading, but I think they can be a little more convenient.”

Asama: “...Somehow I’m not at all surprised.”

Silver Wolf: “...I don’t think I’ve ever heard someone refer to themselves as ‘convenient’.”

While they heard the sounds of reconnection and tuning, a shadow fell on the roof of the front school building.

Vice President: “Okay, I’ll give you your instructions.”

Kimi and Horizon looked to the sign frame displaying Masazumi's words.

Vice President: *"At the moment, the interception unit is working to turn this into a definite battle. ...This was an attack from Houjou. If we return fire, it becomes a 'battle' instead of just a warning. That is the best result here."*

"She makes it sound so easy."

Naomasa spoke in the night sky while firing from Jizuri Suzaku.

"The Houjou fleet has slowed its approach at 20 kilometers south-southwest! The Azuchi Castle is now visible in the Edo region! What the hell is going on here?"

Vice President: *"Judge. P.A. Oda does not intend to let us approach Mouri and Houjou."*

Masazumi continued after confirming everyone on the divine transmission had gone silent.

Vice President: *"Just when we thought Hashiba was going to leave the Tottori Castle at their headquarters of Lake Biwa Azuchi, they brought it all the way to Edo. That was so they can send the Azuchi Castle to the Mouri battle and end it with a short-term showdown."*

Flat Vassal: *"Is that at all connected to Houjou attacking us?"*

Azuma: *"Eh? Isn't that because they don't want the Musashi stopping the Azuchi Castle from heading to Mouri? Isn't that why they had Houjou attack?"*

Novice: *"Not quite! Not quite, Azuma-kun! To explain-..."*

Musashi King: *"That is not the case, Azuma-kun. The Azuchi Castle need not approach the Musashi. If they move west through the territory of their allied Association of Indian States, they can reach Mouri territory at a leisurely pace without engaging in combat with Musashi. And that is the exact course the Azuchi is currently taking."*

Four Eyes: *"He got in ahead of you."*

Novice: *"Sh-shut up! ...But doesn't that make it all the more compelling of a*

question? Why is Houjou moving against us when we couldn't even reach the Azuchi? To explain-..."

This sounded like it was going to be lengthy, so Masazumi gave the answer herself.

Vice President: "P.A. Oda is plotting to cut the connection between Houjou and us. That way we can't work behind the scenes with Houjou to start the Battle of Kanagawa. And this also prevents the Musashi from approaching the Azuchi. Even if we can't reach them, displaying intent to attack would mean one important thing."

Namely...

Vice President: "It would demonstrate Musashi's intent to support Mouri."

"They've got a pretty interesting situation set up in the east, don't they?"

A white structure existed in a vast night field surrounded by distant forest.

The wind scattered the grass around an aerial warship measuring more than a kilometer in length and bearing the seal of Hexagone Française.

It was the Pension Versailles.

A woman spoke from its deck while looking into the eastern night sky.

"So they're quickly swapping out the Tottori Castle we gave them and sending in the Azuchi Castle instead, huh?"

"It would seem Hashiba is being very cautious when it comes to us."

The *signe cadre* by her hand displayed a glowing young man atop a tower in the night.

"Put some clothes on, Exiv."

"Heh. Only if you put them on me."

"You'd just dodge out of the way."

"That only proves you are not serious about it, Terumoto. At least allow me that sort of decision."

“Is that so?” Terumoto spoke to the Roi-Soleil. “What Hashiba’s afraid of is a pincer attack from Musashi and us on the east and west. They’re also afraid of Musashi and us deepening our friendship. If Musashi attacked Hashiba now, it would leave us indebted to them in a big way. After all, we fall under Hashiba’s rule if Mouri loses after this. To put it another way, this is Musashi’s last chance to earn some points with us.”

“Testament. And that is why Hashiba is working to avoid that at all costs. And that includes sending their allies in Houjou after them.”

“That said, they don’t want Houjou to fight an actual war. It’s only a warning or an assault.”

Terumoto saw shadows gathering on the field below. They were...

“The members of our maid automaton unit that will stay with you are gathering, princess.”

Terumoto nodded at the explanation from Mouri-01 who stood next to her. She also put on the long *gakuran*-style summer uniform shirt the automaton handed her.

“Houjou has the history recreation of a battle against Matsudaira in the period from Nobunaga’s death to their destruction.”

“You mean the Tensho Jingo Conflict?”

“Testament,” said Terumoto. “Immediately after Nobunaga’s assassination, Matsudaira heads out from their headquarters to take revenge and Houjou uses that as a chance to drive out Oda’s Takigawa Ichimasu. When Matsudaira returns, they join the battle and then work out peace terms when the battle looks like it’s going to last a while.”

So...

“This assault was initiated by Houjou. Even if the Battle of Kanagawa that drives Takigawa from Kantou is a prerequisite, Musashi can automatically turn this into the Tensho Jingo Conflict if they establish it as a ‘battle’. And by ‘passing Kanagawa’ like that, they can establish the post-Nobunaga period in advance. Also...”

“The Mouri clan loses to Hashiba before the Tensho Jingo Conflict. Right?”

“Testament,” confirmed Terumoto while looking to Mouri-02 and 03 lining up the maids below. 03 noticed her and waved, so she nodded back. “We fought Hashiba before Nobunaga’s assassination, but when Hashiba received word of the assassination, they hurriedly sue for peace with us. ...So they can take revenge. They used flooding in their attempt to defeat us. It’s exactly what you would expect of Hashiba since they’re so skilled at construction. And when Hashiba eventually destroys Houjou, they do it with the flooding they couldn’t complete with us.”

So...

“If the post-Nobunaga Tensho Jingo Conflict is established here, Hashiba’s attack on Mouri will not be as effective. We should be able to find a way to stop it midway. If Musashi is to leave us indebted, that would be the best way.”

“So will Musashi work to establish a ‘battle’ by attacking Houjou?”

“That should be their basic tactic. But the Warring States period is already reaching its end. All the forces that still remain really know how to survive. They’ll use every trick in the book. ...As will Musashi.”

With that, Terumoto raised her right hand.

She saw responding motions down below.

A total of 1000 maid automatons brought their heels together and spoke in unison.

“Yes, sir!!”

“Good girls.”

To her right, Mouri-01 kneeled and held something up.

It was a wooden sword. Terumoto took the darkly colored weapon, rested it on her shoulder, and raised her eyebrows in a smile.

“Listen up, everyone. We’re about to head for the front line. Our nudist will remain on the rear guard, but this is a Mouri battle. We’ll take the lead and settle it all ourselves.”

“Yes, sir...!”

Their voices rang nice and loud.

“We’re taking a Testamenta Arma and Logismo Oplo along for a fun little outing. The Reine des Garous will catch up with this later, so we need to have a nice greeting ready for her. Musashi seems to be taking action in the east, but we aren’t gonna let ourselves be indebted to them. After all, we’ve got Europe’s conqueror supporting us. So...” Terumoto raised the wooden sword and pushed out her chest. “Let’s get to the front line to show them what kind of women we are!!”

“This is ‘Ariake’ with a report. We have arrived 11 km above the ocean. The Oushuu ships are leaving from the stern. Over.”

With that report, the Ariake shook from shell hits.

The Oushuu transport and trade ships began to leave the stern port.

The Ariake had to maintain its stealth mode until they had left the battle’s danger zone. But...

“Houjou is not approaching! They are falling back to keep a set distance!”

Houjou’s fleet knew the range of their shells and was staying there.

It was currently falling back to the southwest, forming a horizontal line, and constantly firing.

Musashi was fighting back with defense barrier shells, but...

“We’ve got plenty of ammo, but not enough guns!” shouted Naomasa.

Immediately, a whistling sound filled the sky.

“What...?”

“This is ‘Ariake’ with a report. 12 enemy crafts are rapidly approaching from south-southwest. They will fly north-northeast at 600 meters above the Ariake in another 21 seconds. They are...”

They had already arrived. Twelve points of light flew in on a rising trajectory from somewhat lower down.

“...mechanical phoenixes. Garuda Ver. 46s are approaching with bombs equipped. Over.”

A deafening sound passed northward above the Ariake. And...

“Take cover!!”

Naomasa’s voice was answered by light on the Ariake’s roof.

An incredible quantity of light explosions struck the top of the Ariake and tore it away.

“What is this light!?”

When Tenzou and Mary arrived on the Ariake’s roof ahead of the others, they saw light.

White light fell from the sky and shined along the top of the Ariake in around a dozen lines from south to north.

But they were more than just illumination. After all...

“Master Tenzou! The light is destroying the armor!”

...*Destroying!*?

Tenzou checked the white light decorating their surroundings.

He looked in the direction Mary was pointing and saw what was happening around one of the light sources.

“It’s melting into light!?”

It was a slow destruction by light.

There was no heat. But the areas that the light hit and that reflected the light turned to ether and vanished.

Was it all turning to light?

No, Tenzou had heard of this phenomenon where things became light and disappeared.

10ZO: “This is *moksha*! This is nirvana!”

Uqui: “Is that supposed to be a euphemism? Why are you doing perverted things in the middle of battle?”

Me: “And he even felt the need to tell us!”

Mal-Ga: “You are the worst.”

10ZO: “That isn’t what I meant.”

Mary tilted her head when she saw the sign frame.

Scarred: “Is there something indecent about being nervous?”

10ZO: “Well, it would be hard to say there aren’t indecent things that make you nervous, but I said ‘nirvana’ not ‘nervous’.”

“Oh,” she said just as a dull sound came from beyond her.

One of the bigger falling lights had pierced the roof’s primary armor. The air flowed in between the primary and secondary armor and the welded portions came apart.

“...!”

The roof trembled beneath their feet as the latches came violently undone. And it happened more than once. It happened again and again.

...We have to stop this!

But, thought Tenzou. How do we do that?

10ZO: “Please find a countermeasure to this! The enemy’s bombs are light-melting types! Anywhere that reflects the shell light is melted into ether!”

Asama: “Understood! I think we should prepare a barrier!”

Wise Sister: “That’s our Asama! So what do those preparations entail!?”

Asama: “Well... Tenzou-kun, please run into the light. It would be faster to have someone investigate it on the scene.”

10ZO: “Now you’re using me as a human guinea pig!?”

As soon as Tenzou said that, Naomasa shouted at them while firing a defense barrier shell to the southwest.

“The second wave is coming!!”

The Ariake group managed to predict where the bombs would hit.

Upward-facing sign frames appeared on the front of the Ariake to indicate those locations.

They displayed predictions for the courses of the mechanical phoenixes, the courses of the dropped bombs, and the locations of the bomb hits.

But even if they knew what course the mechanical phoenixes would take, they had no way of fighting back. After all, the god of war sniper unit's rifles were all in use defending against Houjou's shells.

The one thing they could do was activated while "Ariake" spoke.

"Opening upper surface defense barriers. Over."

A great many gravitational barriers appeared above the Ariake.

They made an accurate attempt to stop the falling light bombs.

But they failed.

"They were breached!? Over."

The light bombs broke through the gravitational-type defense barriers. The weeping willow of light extended its branches and fell as if the triple digit number of barriers in the sky did not exist.

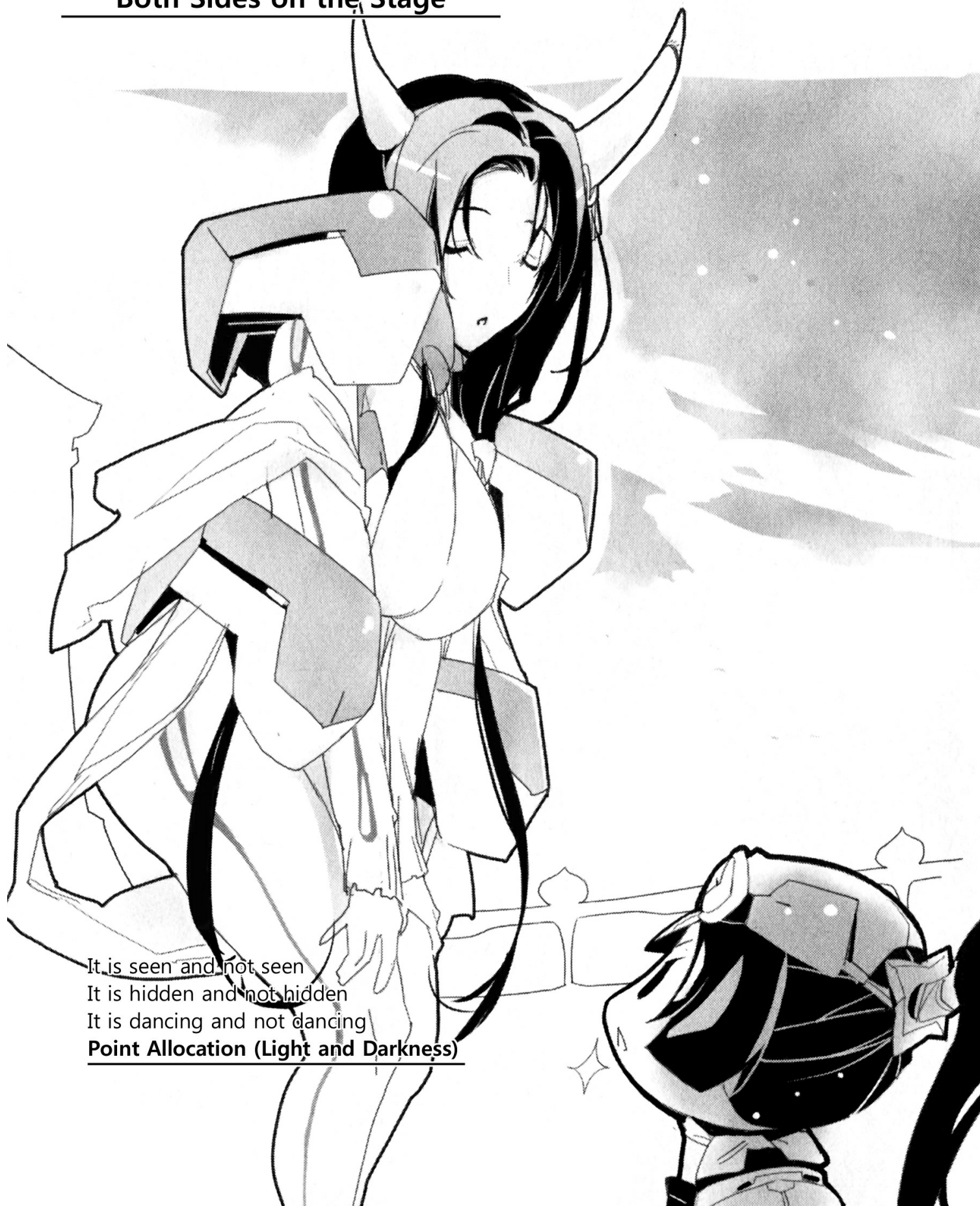
"...!"

When they hit, the Ariake's upper surface was covered with light.

Chapter 11: Both Sides on the Stage

CHAPTER 11

"Both Sides on the Stage"



It is seen and not seen
It is hidden and not hidden
It is dancing and not dancing
Point Allocation (Light and Darkness)

It is seen and not seen

It is hidden and not hidden

It is dancing and not dancing

Point Allocation (Light and Darkness)

The damage to the Ariake was visible from the sky.

It was a mountain of light spreading horizontally at a point about 2 kilometers above Mito.

The explosions of light dropped by the mechanical phoenixes were dissolving the Ariake's upper armor.

Someone viewed that light from beyond the stealth barrier hiding the Ariake from the bottom and sides.

"Due to the angle we are viewing it from, the edges look very bright, Ujinao-sama."

"Even my senses can tell that, Kotarou."

They were 20 kilometers south-southwest of the Ariake. The Houjou fleet and the Association of Indian States warships it commanded were monitoring the results of their attack in the night sky.

"Now, then." The shoulders of Ujinao's white track suit rose and fell as she took a breath. "Houjou's...or rather, India's sublimation bombs can be dealt with using specialized methods, but Musashi has been involved with the Testament Union's European nations for so long that they will likely have some trouble."

"Yes, because that is simply ether light," said the ninja Mouse girl at Ujinao's feet. She looked up at Ujinao. "Gravitational defense barriers use gravity to repel forces and objects, so they detect the ether and stop it. But our sublimation bombs are powerless. They are no more than light. However, they include a spell that reacts to whatever it is they illuminate."

Instead of a spell that affected things from the inside out, this kind of spell left

the interior untouched and caused a change in the exterior the light shined on. These were known as...

“Influence spells. ...The Musashi Chancellor’s propagation spell is the greatest example of a leader’s spell that produces effects from the inside out, but in India, spells are made to indicate those who are influenced and awoken by the leader’s words and actions.”

So...

“Even after a great leader’s death, even in a multiracial nation, and even if we are ruled over by another nation, our religion will continue. The teachings of Dunhi tell us to sense the gods and change ourselves accordingly. I think the other religions are much the same there, but our spells do things through the influence of our gods.”

The third wave began.

The sky rumbled and explosions of light spread waves through the sky. Ujinao placed a hand on her cheek and sighed.

“Noriki-sama...”

“Ujinao-sama! Ujinao-sama! I’m not sure what that reaction means!”

Tenzou escaped the path of the explosions with Mary in his arms.

Surprisingly, there was no heat or wind, only the scattering light. But the dull sounds he occasionally heard from the floor were proof that the primary armor was being consumed and stripped away.

...Not good!

Musashi was not actually engaging in battle with Houjou.

This was a unilateral attack.

Even if they tried to give more meaning to this battle, Houjou could simply say they were only testing Musashi’s strength.

Hori-ko: “How are we supposed to begin the war Masazumi-sama wanted so badly!?”

Vice President: “That’s technically accurate, but nuance is important!!”

But what were they to do?

...The real problem is that we can’t defend against this!

The Oushuu fleet still needed some time to leave the danger zone.

But during that time, Musashi had no way of defending against these light bombs.

Shells were still arriving from the southwest with perfect aim, so they had their hands full returning fire there.

347: “The light does seem to be settling down. I don’t think just a single blast can reach the tertiary armor!”

Sticky King: “The problem is that the enemy crafts are still coming!”

That’s right, agreed Tenzou as he set Mary down. The enemy mechanical phoenixes were still attacking in turn. They were unlikely to let up on the attack until Musashi fought back or at least appeared to be preparing to fight back.

...What do we do!?

Just as he wondered that, a sudden light appeared nearby.

...Did they drop another light bomb!?

He quickly turned around but found something else: Mary.

Her shrine maiden outfit was white. And the fabric had dissolved away from the bottom of the breasts where the light had been reflected.



“Master Tenzou? Is something the matter?”

Her underboob was exposed, but that was a blind spot for Mary. She could not see it.

...Kh!

She tilted her head and he briefly hesitated over whether to tell her he could see or to hold his tongue and continue his manly observation. But...

...Not good!

Mary-dono does not like lewd ninjas, he told himself while punching his mental dick.

That switched it off, confirmed the ninja. Tenzou then prepared to tell Mary her blind spot was exposed.

“Mary-dono!”

“Wh-what is it?”

He just about said, “That surprised look is wonderful too.”

But he quickly told himself that was not what he had to say and prepared to say something else.

“D-do you like lewd ninjas?!”

“Hee hee. If it’s you, I don’t mind.”

That switched it right back on, confirmed the ninja. Especially when she said it while holding her hands together like that.

...I-is staring my only option now?

Just as he started falling into deep meditation, Mary noticed something.

“Ah. Master Tenzou, your pants.”

“Eh?”

He looked down to find his pants had turned to light up to just below his hips, making them something like a grass skirt.

“Wh-why did that happen!?”

“Um, is it because black things reflect more light?”

He felt pathetic, but he had to retreat. Student and shrine maiden clothing had protective effects, so now that those had fallen apart, they were on the battlefield literally and figuratively naked. He might be fine, but...

“Mary-dono!”

“Eh? ...Oh, right. Judge!”

She smiled and held out a hand, so Tenzou grabbed it and started toward the hatch behind them.

That was when someone appeared from the hatch.

“Hey, Tenzou, what are you doing with Mary?”

The idiot was there. Hearing his voice and several people following him, Tenzou looked to Mary.

...I can't let them see her boobs!

Tenzou immediately pushed at Mary's chest with both hands.

Asama had a stockpile of defense and reflection spells in the Asama Shrine databank, so she managed and arranged those spells while arriving atop the Ariake with Toori's group.

And there she saw...

“...Eh?”

A pantsless ninja was groping a shrine-maiden-dressed English princess's chest.

Toori, Kimi, Mitotsudaira, Horizon, Naruze, and everyone else around Asama came to a stop.

They all remained motionless and said nothing.

“...”

Sensing their silence, the ninja looked back and gasped.

“Everyone! It's dangerous here!”

“You are the worst,” said Naruze while beginning a sketch.

That clued Tenzou into how this had to look.

“W-wait! There’s a good reason for this!”

“Heh heh. And is it ‘I was feeling really horny all of a sudden’? It was, wasn’t it?”

“That would be an excuse, not a reason!”

Oh, no! thought Tenzou.

This was dangerous. How was it dangerous? If he let go, Mary’s breasts would be visible. *Am I being too possessive if I don’t mind them being visible but don’t want anyone else to see them?*

However, he had done nothing wrong. Yes, this was the act of a pure heart.

“Tenzou-kun, I didn’t think you *really were* that kind of person.”

“You might as well be saying you kind of thought I was, Asama-dono!!”

Then a look of sudden realization came to Mary’s face. Everyone’s reactions seemed to have told her what this situation looked like.

She quickly turned her head toward their awful friends.

“U-um...”

Her breasts jiggled, so Tenzou changed the angle and strength of his hold on them.

He only had one shot at this and it was playing out in real time. But Mary gasped a little and brought a hand to her mouth.

“Ah, Master Tenzou. Not so rough...”

Everyone put on a serious expression. For some reason, Asama held her bow and opened it up and Mitotsudaira pulled out two silver chains.

“You’re preparing to fight back against Houjou, right?” asked Tenzou.

“Eh? Why would you think that?”

“I-I don’t like that answer!!”

However, Mary had more to say. She raised her eyebrows a little and wrapped her hands around his.

“No, everyone. This is a misunderstanding.”

Oh, heavenly salvation...! thought Tenzou as he looked at Mary.

“Mary-dono...!”

“Judge. Isn’t that right, Master Tenzou? Everyone is definitely misunderstanding this.”

“Judge! Indeed they are!”

“Yes. After all, you asked me earlier if I liked lewd ninjas and I said I did if it was you.”

So...

“This was not forced. It is a consensual act.”

Tenzou heard everyone take a deep breath.

Uqui: “The tension of the battlefield led you to grope your wife’s breasts?”

Asama: “He took advantage of Mary’s inability to refuse anything he asks of her. This was definitely a crime.”

Gold Mar: “Enough debate. What are we supposed to do about it?”

Hori-ko: “Yes, discussing how to deal with him comes first.”

10ZO: “Wait! This is progressing far too quickly!”

Smoking Girl: “The 4th wave is coming!!”

Mitotsudaira saw the light and sound approaching.

Her sign frame displayed the courses of the enemy crafts and the trajectories of their falling light bombs. One of the latter lines ended where they were standing, so she quickly grabbed the Chancellor and Horizon with her silver

chains.

“We need to fall back to safety!”

One of the silver chains swung the Chancellor up toward one of the enemy crafts, but it was not long enough.

...C'mon, silver chain. Did you pick up some bad habits on our trip to Sviet Rus?

“Ujinao-sama! It seems the enemy is threatening us by swinging their Chancellor around!”

“...Kotarou. How many times do I have to tell you to ensure the accuracy of your reports?”

“I-I'm sorry!”

Kotarou turned around and opened a divine transmission sign frame. She held a conversation and nodded a few times.

Then she turned back toward Ujinao with her eyebrows raised.

“Ujinao-sama! ...It seems the enemy is threatening us by swinging their Chancellor around!”

“Kotarou, I have no idea what you mean by that.”

“This is accurate! Please believe me!”

“Then draw me a picture of it, Kotarou.”

“Testament!”

Kotarou used her fingers on her sign frame to draw a picture of a stick figure attached to a string and swinging around the sky. The Garudas were also drawn in a simplified fashion.

“Ujinao-sama! Like this! Like this!!”

Ujinao opened a sign frame next to her head. With her eyes still closed, she raised her hand next to her right temple and transferred the information to herself.

“Hm, hm...pff.”

She looked away from Kotarou for about two seconds.

Afterwards, she looked back with her usual composed expression.

“Kotarou, you really are cute. I think I’ll hang this drawing in my living room.”

“P-please don’t! And please stop referring to the top floor of the castle tower as your ‘living room’!”

“I’m only using the modern terminology, Kotarou.”

“Why do you take everything at your own pace, Ujinao-sama!? Are you craz-... oops, that’s getting a little too relaxed!”

“I can’t exactly help it. We know the castle will eventually get flooded, so I’ve made my living room and bedroom-...hee hee. Oh, how indecent of me.”

“Ujinao-sama! Ujinao-sama! Please come back to us! Your automaton calculation speed is moving your thoughts too fast to keep up! Are you that upset that you have to follow Hashiba’s orders in this attack!?”

As soon as Kotarou said that, a change occurred in the sky.

It was the light. The flat, bottomless wave of light in the sky above the Ariake...

“Disappeared...!?”

“Provide a more accurate report, Kotarou.”

“Testament.” Kotarou nodded and raised her voice to a yell. “Our Descending Light Bombs have vanished...along with their area of influence!”

Naomasa saw the disappearance of the light that had been shining on them and tearing apart the Ariake’s roof.

It had happened when the 4th wave of enemies was approaching.

Just as the light bombs had been dropped...

“The stealth barrier?”

It had been done on an order from “Ariake”.

There was now no light above the Ariake and a thin fog instead. That fog had

been created to let the Oushuu fleet escape to the north, but...

“Did they extend it over here too?” “Yes,” confirmed Asama. “Yoshy-chan instructed us to.”

Asama looked below them where the night sky was melting away beyond the thin fog.

“How does this work?”

Righteousness: “It’s simple. Satomi once gathered some traces left behind when those light bombs were being tested. We could only guess, but we concluded that stopping the light would stop the influencing effect that turns things to light.”

Novice: “So since anything that reflects the light is dissolved, you only have to erase the light itself? But it is nearly impossible to erase a light when it is its own source.”

So...

Righteousness: “We use the stealth fog so that we ‘can’t see’ the light. Since we ‘can’t see’ the light, it loses its power. That’s the trick. I believe they’re called Descending Light Bombs and their effect lasts about 3 minutes. If we maintain the stealth for that long, they won’t do anything to us.”

Scarred: “You can do the same thing with water, can’t you?”

Righteousness: “Satomi considered that countermeasure too. But be careful, okay?”

Obscene: “Ha ha. Be careful of what?”

Silver Wolf: “Of what it means for them to use light bombs that can be negated by a stealth barrier against the Ariake which can put up a stealth barrier.”

Me: “So are they actually tsundere and they wanted us to negate their bombs?”

Hori-ko: “Aaaand he’s gone. Next person, go ahead.”

Unturning: “Strategy-wise, I would assume they wanted to have the Ariake

close itself up in the stealth. Because in stealth mode, the Ariake can't put up a defense barrier or make any large movements."

Narumi's words continued on everyone's sign frames.

Unturning: "Hashiba's instructions to Houjou were probably to stretch the attack out as long as possible while also keeping us from turning it into a mutual 'battle'. And while we're stuck dealing with Houjou, the Azuchi Castle can leave port to indicate that Musashi could do nothing to them."

Naomasa looked out and saw the lights of Edo beyond the stealth fog and incoming shells.

She had descended to Edo a few times. She only viewed it as a harbor with tasty fish, a shopping district, waterways, and rivers, but there was currently a giant ship in the sky above it.

...So that's the Azuchi.

I don't want to let it get away if possible, she thought.

During the Battle of Mikatagahara upon arriving in Kantou, that Azuchi Castle had pursued the Musashi while they were unable to fight back.

Satomi Yoshiyori had done everything he could, but he had entrusted everything else to them.

That Satomi Chancellor had been a god of war pilot her own age. She had originally lived in Kantou and she wanted information on the Suzaku, so there had been a lot she wished she had been able to talk with him about. But...

Smoking Girl: "After everything they've done, the Azuchi is just going to run?"

Naomasa spoke while firing back at the enemy and having Jizuri Suzaku swap out the sniper rifle's overheated barrel.

Smoking Girl: "Once again, there's nothing we can do."

Worshiper: "Could we send the Musashi out and charge at them?"

Novice: "We'd be a sitting duck for Houjou while descending from the Ariake. After destroying Novgorod and driving back Shibata's forces, the other nations see us as a victor. I want to avoid damaging that reputation here."

Uqui: “But if we hide in the Ariake’s stealth bubble and let them escape, we’ve utterly lost?”

Unturning: “Exactly. ...Musashi’s task here is finding a way to turn this around to our advantage.”

Righteousness: “That’s right.”

Those words arrived just as a blue heavy god of war rode a lift up to the Ariake’s roof.

It was Satomi’s Righteousness.

And Righteousness drew the sword at its hip.

“I will take care of half of Houjou’s cannon fire. But...”

Righteousness turned toward the idiot among those standing in the center of the roof.

“Musashi Chancellor, to be honest, I want to get an attack in on the Azuchi.”

Horizon looked to the idiot.

The shrine maiden crossdresser faced the blue god of war.

The crossdresser lifted up and lowered his fake breasts.

“You understand what it means to seek that answer from me, don’t you?”

“I thought I did until that weird motion just now!!”

“Don’t be silly. I was only showing you I have something you don’t. You should thank me. ...Also?”

The idiot pointed southward with his thumb. He did not look back that way himself.

...I have determined that means he does not consider it worth looking at.

He was indicating this was a foregone conclusion. And he opened his mouth to say so.

“Flatty.”

Horizon slapped the back of the crossdresser's head. It was a tsukkomi. But...

"Mh...?"

Her blow had a metallic feel to it.

The idiot laughed beyond his blonde crossdressing wig that fluttered in the air.

"Too bad, Horizon. I currently have the beauty god's c-c-cu-cu-cutic-...oh, I can't say it right! Well, anyway, I raised my defenses with a blonde helmet I got from that god!"

"Yoshy-sama, you may ignore this idiot and go."

"Eh? Ohh?"

"Wait! Please don't just ignore what I'm saying! It's important!"

Horizon sighed through her nose and placed a hand on her ear.

"Yes? What is it?"

"D-dammit. I won't lose this time! ...Anyway, Flatty?"

"Don't just expect me to answer to that, you idiot. But I don't feel like messing with this any longer, so what is it?"

"She sure is cooperative," commented the others.

Horizon had to agree and then she listened to what the idiot had to say.

"You're not ready to go attack the Azuchi yet."

Good, thought Yoshiyasu inside Righteousness.

She was inside the virtual cockpit, meaning she was seated on a small tatami-mat tearoom.

"You think so?"

"Judge. I mean, you have no goal for attacking the Azuchi."

"Avenging the previous Chancellor."

"You dummy. That's a reason, not a goal." The idiot looked up at her with a smile. "Reasons are in the past. Goals are in the future. Even I know that much."

“Are you saying there is a goal for attacking the Azuchi?”

She wanted to defeat this opponent. But while she had a reason for that, was there also a goal?

Yoshiyasu just about passed that question off to the idiot.

...Ah.

There was a goal.

No, she did not have a goal herself. But...

...Yoshiyori had one.

Namely...

“Protecting the future creation of a nation where people wouldn’t have to live like us...”

Eh? thought Adele.

She was sending Raging Beast out on the lift. She had been listening to the Satomi President and their own Chancellor’s conversation thanks to a divine transmission sent by Asama, but something about the conversation had not gotten through to her.

But as the lift’s hatch opened, the foggy night sky came into view, and cannon fire rumbled, she definitely heard their Chancellor’s next words.

“You too will be able to do that before long.”

“...What do you mean?”

“I’m saying you became Student Council President when you’re only in the 2nd year, Flatty.”

As the crossdresser said “trust me”, he looked behind all the others.

A blue god of war stood beyond him.

And he spoke to Righteousness while Horizon held a hammer next to him for some reason.

“I’m sure Yoshiyori and the others made someone as flat as you their

President because they knew you could do it.”

“Are you looking down on my skill?”

“Then are you saying you’re better than our Seijun? Seijun’s pretty strong, you know? She recovered even with a whole crowd seeing her underwear, she turns everything into war, and her flat chest power is greater than yours.”

“Oh, and I thought she was a normal one. But if she’s special too, then she doesn’t count.”

Vice President: “What was that!? What did you just start and end there!?”

Obscene: “It means they respect you, Honda-kun!”

Sticky King: “You could also say they are in awe of you! Well done, Masazumi.”

Glad I’m not her, thought Adele, but then Righteousness lowered its shoulders as if sighing.

“You’re overestimating me.”

“Tell that to Yoshiyori.”

“Are you telling me to die?”

“No, I’m not.” The Chancellor pointed down, toward the Musashi inside the Ariake. “I’m telling you to get onboard eventually.”

Yoshiyasu was briefly confused by the idiot’s gesture.

But after a while, she got it.

Instead of working out its meaning, she seemed to drag out the meaning that had already existed inside her.

It would be too kind to call it an awakening. The thoughts awoke inside her like a sudden blow to the head.

So...

“Judge. That’s right.”

Yoshiyasu turned her back on the idiot, lowered her sword, and moved

forward to accomplish her current job.

Her goal was to protect Musashi's future. Her reason was the same.

If her reason and goal were in alignment, then that was her righteousness.

So she looked away from the Azuchi Caste.

"Since I'm still inexperienced, this is my loss. I'll accept you're still out of my reach."

But...

"One day for sure...Yatsufusa and I will bring you down to the earth."

"Excellent."

Northwest of the Ariake, a Mogami fleet was deployed to the provisional border between Mogami and Shirakawa.

A nine-tailed woman stood atop the Yamagata Castle to welcome the Oushuu trade ships returning from the Ariake. She closed the large fan she held.

A giant sign frame floated in the air in front of her. It was a telescope spell using night amplification processing to display the scene atop the damaged Ariake.

The salmon Mouse next to her spoke.

"Yoshiaki-sama! What is excellent, mon!? I'm no good at riddles, mon!"

"I never have to be alone with my thoughts with you around, Shakenobe."

Yoshiaki laughed in her throat.

Then she watched Righteousness use its wings to fly from the Ariake. The blue god of war faced the incoming cannon fire.

"...!"

And it turned half of the shells into sparks.

The intense sound came from far to the southeast instead of from the sign frame. The loud rumbling made it sound like the sky was falling down on them. Yoshiaki nodded a few times as she listened.

“It would seem she has no doubts. Is she facing the future more than she was before?”

“Yoshiaki-sama, what does that mean, mon!?”

“That girl is unsure whether she will become a cowardly dog or a fighting dog.”

Listen.

“In her position, no one would complain if she became a cowardly dog who only receives food and love. So no one would criticize her if she only ever wandered around and around, showing that she was small and powerless and others are large and powerful.” Yoshiaki held her fan up to her mouth.

“Becoming a fighting dog is much the same. She must know herself and know her opponent, but the bite only takes an instant. And to bring about that instant, she must wander around and around to search them out, to get them to lower their guard, and to make bluffs. But...”

“But? But what, mon?”

The corners of Yoshiaki’s mouth rose at that question. And she let them stay that way as she responded.

“But you see...”

She repeated herself and focused her ears on the distant sounds of battle.

“A fighting dog seeks their final place. A place of rest. For the dogs who must take the longest journey to reach the place they most need to be, even if they learn how to fight, to defeat their opponent, and achieve a temporary home, they will always feel alone.”

“Do you know any dogs like that, mon?”

“Satomi’s previous Chancellor was one.”

Yes.

“Will you be the same, Yoshiyasu? Even if you complete the preparations, complete the journey, and complete the cleanup, the path of a fighting dog is a long one. And...”

Yoshiaki laughed bitterly.

“I like the kind of child that goes to have some fun after doing what she must do.”

“The Ariake has begun moving forward at very low speed! Their trajectory is taking them toward our fleet!”

Ujinao placed a thoughtful hand on her chin at Kotarou’s report.

“Have us move back. After giving us 2 kilometers of space, maintain that distance as we move back toward Edo. ...We will have the Azuchi pass behind us. With 2 kilometers of space, Righteousness should be able to strike back against us and the Azuchi.”

“Testament,” said Kotarou as she sent those instructions to the fleet.

Meanwhile, Ujinao opened a few sign frames around herself. On those, she lined up her instructions from Hashiba.

“The instructions document was made by Hashiba’s Ten Spears #9, Takenaka Hanbei. I’m not sure if I should call this method persistent or inescapable.”

Ujinao brushed a hand through her hair and looked up into the sky.

“But I have my own thoughts on the matter.”

“...Ujinao-sama?”

“Kotarou, use high-precision long-range cannons. We have lost our chance for the mechanical phoenixes’ Descending Light Bombs. Tell Hashiba we will be wearing down the Ariake’s upper surface.”

Ujinao intertwined her fingers and looked to the Ariake in the sky.

“Now, I would appreciate it if you accepted my present to you.”

Chapter 12: Racers in the Night Sky

CHAPTER 12

"Racers in the Night Sky"



How far you can go
Is determined by how far you wish
Point Allocation (Practical Ability)

How far you can go

Is determined by how far you wish

Point Allocation (Practical Ability)

“The Azuchi might pass through here, you say?”

Night covered a city that stretched north to south with a river to its east.

The city was surrounded by a wall and the rebuilt southern gate bore the name Magdeburg.

On the southern hill of the city, a demonic long-lived woman checked on the status of Magdeburg. She looked out into the eastern night sky, but she finally lightly turned her ghostly transparent legs. She turned from east to south and then west.

“Guericke, if the Azuchi does come through here, they will most likely pass along that line. But will the Azuchi really continue straight to Mouri without resupplying or changing ships within P.A. Oda?”

“Testament. Tomoe Gozen, the observation information from Musashi suggests they have too much cargo too well secured to move it around anytime soon. They would need a large fleet to do so.”

“I see,” said Tomoe Gozen as her shoulders relaxed.

She continued without looking back at the bearded man with metal hemispheres on his hands who stood behind her.

“If they need a fleet equivalent to a quasi-Bahamut Class transport ship, it would indeed be better for them to head straight to Mouri. Understood. Now I can predict Hashiba’s general actions from here on out.”

“Tomoe Gozen... What will Hashiba do?”

“I won’t tell you.”

Guericke’s jaw dropped, but she ignored it and asked a question.

“Have we secured the metal tower to the south?”

“Testament. Tomoe Gozen, the local villagers were avoiding it because they ‘don’t want to catch the perversion’, so we settled on cleaning it, recycling the minerals in the unneeded floors, and delivering those materials.”

“It is a shame, as I had hoped to speak with Rudolf II a little more.” Tomoe Gozen crossed her arms. “Well, whatever. Record the Azuchi as it passes by. That should happen in about an hour.”

“That soon?”

“They already used the Tottori Castle to test the Great Return on the way to Kantou. I’m guessing they’ll use a high-speed warship like the Azuchi to test the reverse path out of Kantou,” she explained. “Listen. Shibata and the others are in the southeast as a diversion. Even if they attack, ignore them and continue observations from the metal tower. For a while, it’s going to be impossible to freely contact Hexagone Française in the west. We need an emergency means of contacting them. Got that? Also...”

“What is it?”

“Only contact Musashi via IZUMO. P.A. Oda will likely restrict all external divine transmissions before long.”

“Can they really place such a largescale restriction on the Shinto infrastructure?”

“P.A. Oda’s primary shrine is the Tsurugi Shrine. They have 1400 years of history, they worship Susanoo and the imperial family, and they are a wartime shrine that uses a sword as their *shintai*. It is also known as the Great Oda God and the Oda family is descended from its priests. ...Do you know what that means? I won’t tell you either way.”

Guericke glared at her, but Tomoe ignored it. However...

“The Tsurugi Shrine is their second largest shrine. The largest is the Kehi Shrine, but that means Shinto has some room for flexibility. Their biggest shrine can dodge responsibility by saying responsibility lies with Tsurugi, so they can temporarily take some extreme actions while still being protected by their largest Shinto group. ...The shrine that embraces Susanoo is lawless. Unlike the other, pacifist shrines, they are a threat. And they are superior to the other

combat shrines. They will be a troublesome opponent for Musashi.”

She turned toward Guericke.

“Now, then. Musashi proved at Novgorod that they can win. But what matters is not *that* you can win, but *how* you win. Their current speed of progress does not bode well for the future. Musashi seems to be battling Houjou, but if they cannot produce results here, they will be too late to catch up to the coming events.”

“Yes, Hashiba has already begun their invasion of Mouri and P.A. Oda is beginning to take action regarding Nobunaga’s assassination.”

“That is not all.”

Tomoe pulled a freshly harvested apple from her pocket and tossed it to Guericke. It was a somewhat poorly controlled throw, so he used the hemisphere on his wrist to suck it into his hand.

“This is an apple that survived the Sack, isn’t it?”

“Testament. Stressed fruits and vegetables grow more flavorful. But announcing that in the market is meaningless if you do not put them out for sale and miss your timing. And Mouri and P.A. Oda are already looking at a market far in the future.”

“Far in the future...?”

“I won’t tell you.”

Tomoe laughed, turned her back on Guericke, and opened a *lernen figur*.

“I will continue planting trees here for a while longer. You...oh, I know. You record what is coming. Most likely, we are going to see some major movements as all of the academies begin summer break. But...”

But...

“Whether ‘assassinating Nobunaga’ can be given as summer homework is entirely up to Musashi. ...It does not need to be the Tensho Jingo Conflict, but they need to achieve some kind of results. They need to find a way to drag Mouri or Houjou into it. That is the key to setting the world to motion much more quickly.”

“The Houjou fleet is moving south at uniform velocity. They are maintaining a distance of 22 kilometers. Over.”

Neshinbara crossed his arms as a divine transmission arrived from an operator automaton.

Crossing his arms was entirely meaningless. It simply made him look cool and like a strategist. Placing a hand on his chin was a nice touch and pushing up his glasses really completed the look.

But if he was not actually thinking, then he was no more than an idiot. So he had to think about thinking.

...The way things are going, the question is how we can approach the Houjou fleet.

He understood they only had to speed up, but doing that would require removing their stealth barrier.

Removing that would allow those light bombs to hit them once more. Also...

“ ‘Ariake’-kun, can you remove the stealth barrier on the southern surface? Just for a moment.”

“Judge. It can be removed for units of 7 seconds. Over.”

“Please do so,” he replied before taking a breath.

A moment later, the southern stealth barrier was removed from the Ariake’s bow. Due to the atmospheric interference, white fog appeared around the large opening in the stealth.

It was created by the temperature difference inside and outside. But...

“Here it comes!”

Dozens of enemy shells immediately flew toward the entire surface of the bow. And...

“It’s those light bombs! It looks like they can be used for shells and not just bombs!”

The stealth barrier returned before they hit, but...

“This is ‘Ariake’ with a report. Those enemy shells were adhesive types. I have determined they will likely remain at the point of contact for about 3 minutes. Over.”

With those light shells attached, they could not open the stealth barrier for 3 minutes. If they did...

...The entire front surface of the Ariake would turn to light!

Silver Wolf: “Um, Secretary? Can I ask something real quick?”

Novice: “Eh? What is it?”

Silver Wolf: “Did you just make a terrible tactical mistake?”

Flat Vassal: “...I know, right? I mean, we have to open the stealth to speed up.”

Vice President: “Wait, wait, wait. This is no time for jokes. The Ariake can only head as far south as the border between Edo and Mito territory.”

Marube-ya: “Doesn’t that mean we have less than 40 kilometers left to go? Are we in trouble?”

Novice: “W-we are not in trouble! I have a plan! So don’t worry, everyone!”

Smoking Girl: “What kind of plan?”

Novice: “Judge. I had the perfect plan, but seeing how the enemy reacted there, I realized I need to put a little more work into it. You’ll see the real plan next time, I swear.”

Mal-Ga: “That’s just the excuse of a pathetic author who never actually uploads his work.”

Flat Vassal: “E-everyone, I know I’m not one to talk, but let’s trust the Secretary a little more! He’s the only one that can take responsibility here!”

Novice: “That’s a pretty awful way of looking at this!”

Just as Neshinbara said that, Adele’s Raging Beast vanished from view.

“Eh?” said everyone as they heard some rolling metal from the stern.

“Owwwwww!!”

Mitotsudaira saw what had struck Raging Beast bouncing up into the night sky.

She swiftly sent out a silver chain and caught it as shimmering heat continued to rise from it.

“A physical shell...!? Is the Houjou fleet scattering cannon fire!?”

Wind arrived as soon as she asked that. Righteousness had fallen back from the bow. As for why...

“Focus on the shells heading toward important locations on the upper surface!”

The important locations. That meant Houjou was targeting the hatches for the lifts, the entrance shutters, and the transmission pipes below the armor.

They could hear the sound of shells flying in. And physical shells followed those sounds.

“Incoming!”

Sign frames appeared horizontally out in the sky to indicate the predicted paths and points of impact. Then the defense barriers opened.

“———!”

That steel rain collided with the Ariake from nearly head-on.

The sign frames broke and the defense barriers shattered. It almost sounded like they were being hit by masses of water. They had the defense barriers, but...

...My ears...

Mitotsudaira's Loup-Garou hearing briefly trembled and lost their sound.

But her vision still saw it. Up ahead and low overhead, a few shells passed through the multiple layers of defense barriers.

“ ‘Musashi’ ...!”

Musashi: “I apologize, but that is the Ariake's jurisdiction. I will provide

calculation support, but I can only tell you to work hard to fully protect us from the cannon fire of a nation's entire fleet. Over."

That was exactly right. They had been hit on a smaller scale during the Armada Battle. The Ariake only had so much power and it would be difficult to instantly open barriers when the shells were fired so rapidly and from blind spots.

So the overall result was some direct hits. That was the reality of the situation.

Sounds of impact and scraping could be heard from the rooftop floor below the stealth fog.

But, thought Mitotsudaira. The enemy's ballistic path is too low. Like this...

Silver Wolf: "They are firing level to the top of the Ariake. The shells fly in nearly horizontally, so they should slide and ricochet off like a stone skipping on the water!"

Wise Sister: "In other words, this is a Flat-Chest Defense!"

Shut up. But a sudden noise and shock rejected Mitotsudaira's words.

The enemy shells did not slide along the upper surface. Instead of ricocheting...

"A direct hit!? How!?"

The great noise and vibration erased her question.

...Wh-what does this mean!?

After rolling along in Raging Beast, Adele shook her dizzy head and got back up.

Something raced right by her as she stood up.

It was a shell. A physical one. The Houjou ships located lower than them had fired it in a parabolic arc and it had bounced and slid along the top of the Ariake.

"That was close!"

A shell that flew in horizontally at high speed was worse than one that fell from above. Falling ones would only strike a point, but horizontal ones would hit anything along a line.

And after this one passed her by...

“A direct hit!?”

The gliding shell suddenly and loudly collided with the Ariake’s upper surface.

...I thought it was sliding!? Was that some kind of spell!?

No. Several more deafening sounds reached her, but...

“They’re so close together...”

That was when Adele figured it out.

“These shells are not sliding! It looked like they were flying horizontally, but they’re catching on the holes from the previous light bombs for a ‘direct hit’! They’re further destroying the holes opened by the light!”

Righteousness: “Shit. ...Sorry!”

Mal-Ga: “Instead of using dirty words, how about an explanation? Oh, but don’t ramble.”

Novice: “I don’t ramble! I keep things interesting! Listen, Naruze-kun! For one thing-...”

Tachibana Wife: “Shut up.”

Novice: “Eek.”

Tachibana Wife: “To keep it short, I shall explain, Master Muneshige.”

Tachibana Husband: “Yes. So, Gin-san, you’re going to point out that Houjou is using its two different shell varieties for different purposes to expand the scope of the damage, aren’t you?”

Tachibana Wife: “So you understand. That’s my Master Muneshige. In that case, no explanation is necessary.”

Mal-Ga: “The end...!!”

Righteousness: “No, that is not the end!”

“Yoshiaki-sama! Why are you looking away, mon!? Is something funny, mon!?”

“Oh, I was just realizing that girl has found a very nice place for herself.”

“The point is,” explained Yoshiyasu as she set a virtual foothold in midair to face the incoming shells.

Righteousness: “Houjou has a new strategy that uses the light shells and physical shells for different purposes. It really just means using one before the other, but it’s still an important strategy.”

Do you understand?

Righteousness: “If they fire the light shells first like they did here, the scars act as hooks for the physical shells. Even if we activate the stealth and force them to fire blind, they know they can expand the damage since those scars will gather their shells.”

Hori-ko: “And if they fire the physical shells first, they can fire the light shells into the damage they caused so the damage can reach much deeper right away, correct?”

Righteousness: “And they can also alternate between them to chain those advantages together. ...It pains me to admit it, but this must have originally been meant for use against Satomi. Sorry.”

There’s more than just the Azuchi for me to focus on here, thought Yoshiyasu to admonish herself.

...I guess that crossdresser was right.

That pissed her off, but it also reminded her just how inexperienced she still was, which brought an odd sense of calm. This meant her sister and Yoshiyori were still pushing her forward.

But it was all meaningless if she settled for only that. There was something

she had to do now.

Righteousness: “I’ll intercept the shells! Take care of things back here!”

Neshinbara nodded at Righteousness’s movements. And he measured the enemy’s current position and altitude.

...This is a problem.

He had of course taken measures against this problem.

More than just approach Houjou, they were pushing Houjou from the sea toward the mountains.

Their direction of approach would pursue them to the southwest instead of simply to the south.

That diagonal shift extended the distance they could move and bought some time before they reached the provisional border.

But that diagonal course meant something else as well.

“Their shellfire will focus on our outer corner...”

Removing their stealth meant those light shells. Not removing it meant a downpour of physical shells. The light of defense barriers was scattering overhead and a shell was passing by next to him.

But sign frames showed the path of the shells.

“...Whoops.”

So he only had to shift a half step aside and turn the other way as the powerful mass flew past.

...I had to have looked so cool there.

“Did you see that, everyone!?”

Uqui: “Hey, tear up that armor panel! I might just help you out with my great strength.”

Gold Mar: “If you were hit by shrapnel, could you open a sign frame? The

Schwarz Hexen unit will be there for you!”

Marube-ya: “Excellent, excellent. The combat expenses just keep piling up...”

Hori-ko: “Oh? Neshinbara-sama, why are you holding your right hand out in front of you?”

Novice: “I won’t let this get to me! Yes, a hero must stay strong!”

Smoking Girl: “Get to work on your plan already.”

“Judge,” replied Neshinbara.

Novice: “ ‘Musashi’-kun, you’ve been recording data on them, haven’t you? Display all of that for me. I can use that to predict their movements and we might just be able to turn this around.”

A new sign frame appeared from “Musashi”. It displayed...

“The ballistic patterns of the enemy shells and the estimated mobility of the mechanical phoenixes based on the courses they took. ...Well done.”

Neshinbara spun around to dodge an incoming shell and let his hands race across his keyboard. He put together a pattern for opening the defense barriers and sent it to everyone.

“Let’s smash this stagnation and earn a debt of gratitude from Houjou, Mouri...and P.A. Oda.”

“It would seem they have realized the purpose of the Descending Light Bombs.”

Ujinao sensed a change in the formation of troops atop the distant Ariake.

Kotarou nodded and spoke to her.

“The Ariake has removed its upper stealth! They have lined up defense barriers along the front edge! They are forming a wall!”

“That is an incorrect answer.”

As she said that, a sound and the wind blew in from behind.

It was their mechanical phoenix units. She had not approved their use until

now because the stealth would block the Descending Light Bombs, but...

“This is the correct answer.”

Two units of 12 produced a total of 24 blasts of acceleration with something hanging from their bellies.

They carried reinforced stone spikes measuring more than 30 meters long and the tips were cut diagonally.

“Show me whether you can prevent these stupas from being erected.”

The members of the mechanical phoenix units did not take a straight-line course.

They gradually ascended for a shallow rise, but even with their feinting and curving trajectories, Musashi had a lot of automatons, meaning their trajectories were certainly being read accurately.

But the same was true of the Association of Indian States. They had developed an idol culture since ancient times, so idol worship had become entrenched there and greatly expanded. Houjou had used an interpretation of that history recreation to develop automatons.

Automaton calculations were used for the mobility and management of Houjou’s fleet and mechanical phoenix units.

“Mechanical phoenix unit to HQ. Provide each of us with further safe trajectories.”

At the commander’s request, a few sign frames opened in the cramped mechanical phoenix cockpits. They overlapped with the sign frames displaying the exterior view to provide a few courses marked by lines.

Not one of them was a simple line. They were ascending paths that readily required intersecting the paths of the others.

But according to the automaton officer in charge...

“We have determined this will be safe in the sense that it exceeds the calculations of the enemy automatons. Be safe.”

The final two words necessitated a certain response.

“Dhanyawaad.”

After expressing their thanks to the gods that gave them this destiny, they flew onward.

Their target was the Ariake’s upper surface. It was already scarred by the Descending Light Bombs and physical shells and they would send their reinforced stone spikes in for further damage.

“The enemy has placed defense barriers forward to block our bombardment. ...That is fine for defense, but now those barriers are in the way of their own sniper cannons. They will likely predict our movements and use anti-air cannons beyond the wall. But...”

Shellfire from the Houjou fleet behind them flew out ahead and cleared the way for them.

It shattered the wall of defense barriers prepared atop the Ariake.

The automaton-managed shellfire was accurate and the repeated blasts were opening holes in the wall.

The 12 mechanical phoenixes accelerated through there.

“Send the first unit in! And the second unit...”

The second unit of 12 did not target the Ariake’s upper surface.

They flew toward the Ariake’s invisible bow that only looked like the night sky thanks to the stealth.

“...is already in place.”

Two layers of ultra-high speed stone hammers were launched toward the Ariake.

Everyone on the Ariake’s upper surface saw holes open in the defense barriers in front of them.

The accurate series of shellfire from the Houjou fleet had shattered the line of barriers.

Other than those who had been reinforcing the barriers from behind them...

“Oh, no!”

Everyone had been fortifying the defenses in front of the hatches, ducts, and other important areas. But Houjou’s cannon fire chose to accurately target the open areas instead of them.

Light scattered and holes appeared.

And 12 stone spikes flew toward those holes.

The straight lines of power flew along shallow parabolic arcs and targeted the scars left by the light bombs. Even if they ended up sliding along the upper surface, there were plenty of scars. They would eventually hit one and exacerbate the damage there.

A few of the students cried out as the stone spikes flew by on either side.

“We need additional defense barriers!”

None were forthcoming. The excess barriers that the Ariake could prepare had been sent elsewhere.

“We are defending the front. Over.”

The second unit of mechanical phoenixes fired 12 shots on a direct course for the Ariake’s bow.

They soon met their first obstacle.

“I’ll take the lead when we’re up against Houjou!”

It was Righteousness.

Yoshiyasu tasked herself with destroying 4 of them.

The shots were spread out over a wide area. The gaps between them were more than 50 meters. But...

...I can do it!

She moved. The blue craft moved forward through space in a tight right curve.

“...!”

She smashed 2 of them along the way.

She then flew in a semicircle back and held her sword in a backhand grip to strike behind her.

“Kh...”

Her entire body’s frame creaked at the quick change of direction. Her left half could not quite keep up, but as long as she understood that...

...I remember what the engine division people told me before we went to Mogami.

Righteousness’s frame had been reinforced to keep her safe even if she pushed its movements past the limit.

Her schoolmates from the now-destroyed Satomi Academy had done that.

She had to wonder if they were still alive and watching her now, but that was most likely an indulgence for her, not a restraint.

.../...

She had to do this even without that kind of hope. So...

“————”

She continued on.

As soon as she felt the wind pass by her back, she was enveloped in a gentle sensation like she had dived into a body of water.

“Kh.”

White fog briefly surrounded her entire body. Immediately afterwards, she saw a stone spike within reach of her sword.

She casually smashed it. And then another one.

“Ohhh!”

Four of the head-on attacks had been destroyed.

After wielding her power, Righteousness twisted her body to negate her momentum.

“Take care of the rest!”

With that, she dropped straight down. Wind whipped at her entire body as she used the action to forcibly rid herself of speed. That avoided a collision with the Ariake and the 8 undestroyed attacks passed by overhead to reach the front of the Ariake.

But just before they did...

“Temporarily removing front stealth barrier and opening front defense barriers. Over.”

The Ariake revealed its front surface and opened defense barriers.

The last-second wall smashed the stone like stone.

The spikes were destroyed.

But the walls of rejection were far from unharmed. Smashing apart and wearing down the spikes scattered an immense quantity of ether light.

The sounds of destruction enveloped the sky and split both the stone and the night.

The noise rang loud, but light glowed within the barriers. The previously-fired light bombs regained their power now that the stealth had been removed.

Ohiroshiki and some others had been removing them using water and they now watched the defense barriers consume the stone spikes.

“Waaaah! They’re coming this way!!”

Wise Sister: “That’s a pretty nice sound. I think I’ll record it.”

Me: “Oh, can you send it to me later? I want to use it as a sound effect when I’m sent flying.”

Hori-ko: “Then I need to do my part and try to hit you even harder.”

Asama: “Yes, yes, you three. But you need to get to safety over here!”

However, the 12 attacks to the front were just barely stopped. Only 2 or 3

defense barriers remained. Shells soon arrived to destroy those and collide with the front armor, but the Ariake's armor was thickest on the front. Sparks flew when they hit and Ohiroshiki's group only had to swing from some ropes.

But...

"The upper surface!"

The 12 stone spikes sliding along the top decelerated near the middle of the Ariake and started tilting so they would stab in.

The tip was cut diagonally and they tilted forward as they scraped along the Ariake's upper surface.

"...They're going to pierce us!"

Someone else raised their voice to counter that.

"Bind...Tonbokiri!"

Gin saw Futayo slice the 2 incoming attacks on the far starboard side.

That was well done, but their work was far from over. After all, 10 of them yet remained.

"We will take care of the 4 on the port side!"

Gin immediately summoned an Arcabuz Cruz on either side of herself. The cannons spread like wings and fired repeatedly, piercing the two port-most ones from the side as they flew past.

The sound could not keep up. She only saw the white of sparks and dust as...

...They were destroyed!

The stone spikes broke in half and seemed to bend back as they pointed toward the sky.

The air collided with the damaged portions which accelerated the destruction. The stone spilled shards and broke apart as if great claws were tearing across it.

But before that destruction finished, the whole stone dropped to the Ariake's rooftop and contacted it.

“—————”

It could not withstand that.

The outer shell that maintained the spiked shape was already cracked badly enough for the wind to trigger its destruction, so the stone spikes dumped gravel on the Ariake's rooftop like they were spewing their innards and they ultimately disappeared.

And someone ran alongside the shattered 2 while giving her a glance.

It was Muneshige.

He used his acceleration spell, Racing Toes, to run across the Ariake's upper surface almost like he was climbing the thin fog.

He closed the distance between himself and the stone spikes ahead of him.

“...!”

The quasi-divine weapon named Kamenuki was a sword-like spear that provided pursuit-type acceleration, so his speed and direction were accurately guided by it.

“One...!”

He shattered one.

Well done, thought Gin just before she saw Muneshige do something in pursuit of the other.

...Was that...!?

He ran through the air.

On the starboard side, Futayo watched the half-dragon and Narumi work together to smash 3 of the attacks. She then saw movement on the port side.

It was Muneshige.

...Is he running through the air?

No, he was technically running across the fragments of the destroyed spike. Instead of simply shattering the first stone spike, he had pierced and split it

forward.

He then activated his acceleration spell and used the fragments as footholds to reach the other spike.

Well done, thought Futayo. *I probably could not do the same,* she added.

She would provide her own axis of movement.

Muneshige specialized in receiving his opponent's movements and altering himself to match. So...

"..."

She felt some envy and kind of wanted to try it out herself. And...

...Oh, no.

Futayo was certain of something.

"I am enjoying this."

Had she been like this since Magdeburg and at Novgorod?

She belatedly felt grateful to Fukushima who had opposed her and Kimi who had opened her eyes. She began to run.

I can destroy another one, she told herself.

"If this is enough to delight me, I am still terribly inexperienced!"

Futayo cut another one.

With that, a total of 10 spikes had been destroyed on the upper surface.

But that left 2.

"They're still a threat!!"

Everyone on the Ariake's upper surface was looking at the back end of the stone spikes, not the front end.

But their gazes were answered by a sharp but heavy noise.

Something happened to the 2 stone spikes.

"...They were deflected!?"

Without a single mistake, the 2 lines of stone were knocked high into the night sky.

There was a single trick behind it: defense barriers.

There were traces of many thin defense barriers placed along their path.

Those barriers had shattered into scattering light. “Ariake” had not made it in time, but someone else had.

“This is ‘Musashi’ within the Ariake. We have confirmed the effectiveness of the defense barriers and have determined our support of the Ariake was successful. Over.”

“That was a close one, ‘Musashi’-sama. Over.”

That voice reverberated through a vast white space. It was the bridge room within Musashino’s bridge-shaped ship’s bridge.

Everyone had opened sign frame consoles and recorded the processing of the previous defense barriers for future reference. Someone moved along the lower area of the hall-shaped bridge.

It was Suzu. She created a model of the Musashi and of the Ariake around it and she turned toward the others.

“...Did that...work?”

“Judge. Excellent work, Suzu-sama. Over,” said “Musashino” while carrying Suzu some tea. “Due to Ariake’s jurisdiction, any remote defense barrier support from Musashi requires sending an approval request, receiving the approval confirmation, confirming the data from outside the Ariake, and more. And the situation this time was even more inconvenient with the stealth active.”

“Musashino” saw Suzu spread her mouth horizontally.

“My apologies.” She bowed. “To put it more briefly, your ‘emergency ultra vires act’ of opening and controlling the defense barriers saved both the Ariake and the Musashi. Over.”

“R-right. If...you say so. But...this.”

Suzu reached for the teacup and checked its temperature with a finger before touching it. After confirming it was cool enough to touch, she picked it up and brought it to her lips.

“Thank you.”

“Judge,” replied “Musashino” with a bow.

Suzu took a sip of the tea and spoke.

“But that means...Neshinbara-kun’s information...was right.”

Novice: “See!? Did you hear that, everyone!? You’ve got to reassess your opinion of me now!”

10ZO: “We’re back after changing into new clothes. Um, what’s going on now?”

Scarred: “Oh, Lady Adele, you’re round today. You haven’t done this since IZUMO, have you?”

Flat Vassal: “Judge! This is actually my official equipment!”

Novice: “Listen to meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!!”

Neshinbara swung both hands while cursing in his heart.

The enemy crafts were already scattering high in the sky ahead of them, but Neshinbara raised his voice.

“Ariake! Ascend!!”

After decelerating using its falling trajectory, Righteousness flew back up to the Ariake’s altitude.

Due to the stealth, the Ariake was not visible from below, but...

“Oh...”

The sky grew distorted.

The great mass of the Ariake was making a rapid ascent.

The Ariake's stealth barrier was indeed showing the night sky overhead, but as it moved, the thickness of the distorted air shook the sky.

A rectangular portion of the sky shook like the summer stars.

At the same time, the pressure grew wild. Wind dropped down from the Ariake and the empty space that created sucked in the air, producing fog over a wide area around Righteousness.

Rain fell as if to thinly stain the sky.

Within that, Righteousness continued its ascent.

It could not afford to be late. After all, a sign frame appeared alongside its face. The information there suggested exactly what Musashi's Secretary had said earlier.

"It's up to Houjou...but depending on how this goes, we might just earn a debt of gratitude from Houjou, Mouri, and P.A. Oda!"

"The Ariake is not stopping its ascent! Its altitude has passed 6...no, 7 kilometers! The lower hatch holding the Musashi must be close to its limit!"

Ujinao nodded at Kotarou's puzzled voice.

She understood what the Ariake was doing. However...

...Why ascend here?

If their goal was pursuing the Houjou fleet, they did not have time to ascend.

She could only think of one reason for them to do so.

"Do they not want to receive our shells on their upper surface?"

"Even the mechanical phoenix units will have difficulty securing a safe course at that altitude!"

"Indeed," agreed Ujinao.

The automatons providing full support to Houjou on this battlefield sent the

same prediction as Kotarou.

...The Ariake has chosen ascent as a means of defense.

That was likely not a mistake, but something still bothered her about it. After all...

“At this rate, Musashi will not trigger the Tensho Jingo Conflict with us.”

“Have they given up on earning a debt of gratitude from Mouri?”

The Azuchi was already passing by in the southern sky behind them.

Musashi no longer had anything to show they had supported Mouri. So...

“We must fall back at full speed to end this-...”

Before she could say “battle”, a sign frame appeared next to Ujinao’s face. It was from the divine transmission automaton.

“Ujinao-sama. We have received a divine transmission from Musashi. She claims to be Musashi’s Vice President.”

“...!?”

What is this? wondered Ujinao.

But if this was some kind of attack via transmission, the automaton inspector would have already intervened.

So Ujinao gave her approval.

“Put her through.”

“Testament,” replied the automaton before the voice from the sign frame changed.

She heard alarms and rushing footsteps.

That was the Musashi.

The alarms echoing within the Ariake provided background noise for the voice.

“Musashi Ariadust Academy Vice President Honda Masazumi has a proposal

for Houjou Association of Indian States Odawara Academy Chancellor and Student Council President Houjou Ujinao!”

Namely...

“Musashi wishes to enter a friendly relationship with your academy.”

That’s ridiculous, thought Ujinao. Why were they saying this now?

...Because they realized they could not pursue us after ascending to preserve their own safety?

It was a terrible plan. Houjou had the overwhelming advantage here. So Ujinao prepared to say that was not possible.

But then a thought occurred to her.

Ariake’s ascent and the Vice President’s proposal were entirely worthless, but...

...Would Musashi really not understand that?

That question was directed at herself and she quickly came to an answer.

“———”

Ujinao gasped and closed the sign frame.

But not as a rejection. She knew of Musashi’s statement and did not respond.

Because that was...

“The right answer...!”

As soon as she was confident she had made the right decision, Ujinao sensed something.

Her senses told her it was a light.

The video sent to her by the sensors of the Houjou fleet’s ships told her it was definitely a light.

A single line of light had been fired from the Ariake’s upper surface, but...

“Eh...!?” shouted Kotarou. “That wasn’t directed at us. It’s headed high into

the sky to the west-southwest.”

From their perspective, that was up and to the left of the Ariake.

However, that was an empty patch of night sky.

“The Asama Shrine Representative fired a shrine maiden blast!!”

Chapter 13: Right Holders in the Heavens

CHAPTER 13

"Right Holders in the Heavens"



What is it
That moves me?
Point Allocation (Yourself)

What is it

That moves me?

Point Allocation (Yourself)

"I will hit it...!"

Asama used her entire body while wearing her shrine maiden uniform to fire her bow.

...I need to hurry.

She had to shoot something.

It was harmful to both the Ariake and Musashi.

Someone had to shoot it and expose it.

...And I can do it!

Asama moved.

She opened Kataume and Katatsubaki, the two longbows attached to her left arm, and connected them as the single large longbow named Umetsubaki. And while she aimed it toward heaven and nocked an arrow...

"Clap..."

Her binder skirt lifted up like clawed toes and pierced the spatial fixation spell circle displayed in the air. Then directionally-fixed spell circles appeared in torii form around her and spun with her gaze.

The continuous sounds reminded her of a musical instrument.

After that, picks were driven into the floor from either side of her shoes to fix her body in place. The tail binder on the back of her hips blew out some exhaust wind as it received an ether supply from the Asama Shrine sent to her via the Ariake.

...Here goes.

Her false eye, Konoha, activated while linked with Umetsubaki. A targeting sight appeared, but she generally viewed her target with both eyes when firing.

There was nothing in the sky. But...

...It's there, isn't it?

Just as she took aim as if to ask that question...

Me: "Asama, give us one of your specialties."

Her heart leapt in her chest as she glanced over at the sign frame producing Toori's voice.

...U-umm?

She actually wanted to tell him not to speak to her when she was trying to concentrate, but...

Hori-ko: "Asama-sama, if you are low on power, I can provide a battery for you."

Asama: "Eh!? N-no, that won't be necessary! I couldn't ask that of a contracted member of our shrine!"

Silver Wolf: "But will you be okay? This is a pretty big one."

Wise Sister: "Heh heh. Don't force yourself and then fail, okay? Right, foolish brother?"

Me: "Well, I bet Asama can handle something like this with ease. Right? You can, can't you?"

"O-of course I can!"

She replied loud enough to reach them without the voice input, but that was fine as long as it got rid of their worries.

...Honestly.

Before she could sigh, Hanami sensed her thoughts and began operating the sign frame.

"There's nothing to worry about."

She had made him worry about her during the meeting with Lady Yasuhira. But this was different. That had been about her position and personality, while this was simply about her ability and the Asama Shrine's power.

To put it another way, that incident had told her that he truly trusted her.

So she knew what she had to tell him now.

“You’re telling me to go all out, aren’t you?”

“Yeah. Asama, you’re Musashi’s Shinto representative. So you’ve got this, right?”

“Yes. And I have never failed to fulfill my role during a formal bow firing. This will be no different.”

Yes.

“But, well, if everyone’s expecting a lot from me, I guess I’ll dial the power up a bit.”

“Tomo! Tomo! You’re going that way!?”

You’re the ones that expect this of me.

Okay, Hanami, please raise the power. A 30% increase? Hmm, can we go even higher? A 35% increase? No, no. More than that. ...40%? Hmm, let’s go with 50%. Yes, the others won’t accept it if we don’t go with a nice round number like that. Yes, yes, yes. If I make some adjustments, I can handle that just fine. Yes.

Oh, but if it looks like I’m trying too hard, it’ll look like I’m not confident which is the opposite of saying I’ve “got this” like Toori-kun said... Ah, what do I do? I can’t worry Toori-kun. I definitely can’t worry him in my position. Lower the-...I can’t lower the power now? It’s too late for that? I really can’t, Hanami?

Hmm, then what am I supposed to do...?

“Oh, Asama, it really does look like you’ve got this!”

“Eh?”

Um, so Toori-kun sees cranking up the power like this as a part of saying I’ve “got this”? Yes, yes. That’s right. That’s right, isn’t it?

In that case, Hanami, everything is fine. A 50% increase is just fine.

Hee hee. Don’t you worry, Toori-kun. Horizon, Kimi, Mito? You three could learn a thing or two from Toori-kun about not worrying. Okay?

“Tomo! Tomo! What is that satisfied smile for!?”

Oh, c’mon. This is a job. Only a job. I just happen to enjoy my job.

“Hit!!”

A line of light raced diagonally through the night with no reduction in speed or altitude.

As the beam traveled into the night sky, it looked like a star from the Ariake.

“...Hey.”

Someone spoke up when they noticed something.

In that instant, several lines ran through the sky. They were definite cracks of light.

The crooked lines radiated outwards from the location of the previous “star”. And...

“Is that...?”

The sky suddenly broke apart.

It shattered like glass.

“A stealth barrier!?”

That was exactly what shattered and split.

Shards of the night collapsed and rotated as a large section of the night shed its white foggy shell.

There were 7 large falling shards and countless smaller ones.

Something previously unseen appeared in the sky.

It calmly hovered high in the dark blue night sky.

“A white three-hull ship...!”

Everyone knew its name and shape. It had 4 other ships with it, but the giant white ship in the lead looked down on them.

“Hashiba’s Shirasagi Castle!?”

“I see.”

A ship viewed the 2 white shapes in the southern sky.

It was the Aoba Castle, a half-god of war aircraft carrier aerial warship bearing the Date clan’s emblem.

A horned girl in a blue track suit stood on the deck. She gathered up a jump rope and wiped off her cheeks with the towel draped over her shoulders.

She looked to the southwest and gave a quick nod toward the Mogami fleet that was here to meet the Oushuu trade ships.

“I knew P.A. Oda’s Takigawa had been sent to monitor Houjou, but I didn’t think they would be watching from the sky during battles too. And keeping the additional ships with her during wartime is a very ninja-like level of readiness.”

Katakura-kun: “Poor, naïve Masamune-kun! You truly are naïve! You’re a sweet little thing! Sweet Masamune! When you’re that sweet, everyone’ll want to lick you, Masamune-kun! Now, you can lick me if you want, poor Masamune-kun! C’mon, take a lick of my Sendai beef...”

One-Eyed Dragon: “Did you make sure to drain the blood, slice it up nice and thin, and rub salt on it?”

Katakura-kun: “H-how could you suggest something so horrifying!? You’ve really said it now! Now I have no choice but to say something harsh as well! Like that your waist sticks out a fair bit.”

One-Eyed Dragon: “I don’t feel like dealing with you, so should I call my mom?”

Katakura-kun: “What kind of academy lets its Chancellor and Student Council President call for her mommy!? This kind!? It’s this kind, isn’t it? Is this the world’s first academy that lets the parents carry out executions!? I suppose I should expect nothing less from Sendai Castle’s Principal for 1000 generati-... eh? What is it, Principal Yoshihime? You’re only 10 years old? Splendid! Then let’s have a chat, 10-year-old Yoshihime-chan!”

“Listen,” said Katakura.

Katakura-kun: “Based on the perfect accuracy of the shot from below, Musashi’s Secretary most likely realized they were being monitored from above. Houjou’s reluctance to move their fleet up or down when falling back must have helped clue them in. And the previous exchange would have confirmed it. While Musashi was behind their thick defense barriers, Houjou fired on them and *avoided the vital points*.”

Meaning...

Katakura-kun: “There were barriers in front of those vital points and their stone spikes would only have been deflected, so they avoided those coordinates when firing. But those barriers in front of the vital points were not on the Ariake’s outside edge. They were on the inside.”

“So only someone looking down from above could have seen them? In that case...”

On the deck, Masamune raised her eyebrows a bit.

“Well done. That would be why Musashi’s Vice President said they wanted a friendly relationship with Houjou, wasn’t it?”

Katakura-kun: “It’s the perfect example of harassment diplomacy.”

Katakura spread his arms on the sign frame.

Katakura-kun: “Now, Houjou and P.A. Oda cannot ignore Musashi any longer. ...The battlefield is about to change, Masamune-kun.”

“Ujinao-sama! Let’s support the Shirasagi Castle! We can ascend and attack the Ariake!”

Ujinao had a single response to Kotarou’s words: silence.

She said nothing, raised her eyebrows. And...

“ ...”

She opened a sign frame by her hands. It displayed the visual footage sent to them by the Shirasagi Castle. That footage had been surrounded by a white defense barrier before, but...

...That has changed.

The image she sensed through the hand on the sign frame showed the night sky and the Ariake's upper surface down below.

The white color came from the fog, not the armor. Several students and gods of war stood atop that thin fog.

The Shirasagi Castle had been sending them their coordinates before. The automatons on the ship had exchanged that data with their Houjou comrades and reconstructed an image of their opponents using the coordinate data. And the resultant diagram of enemy positions had been taken into account during their attack.

That meant this was Ujinao's first time to truly sense those on the opponent's battlefield.

He was not there.

Of course, even if he was a student, he was a normal citizen without an official position. He was not in a position to actively participate on the battlefield.

But Ujinao sensed a self-deprecating smile on her lips in response to the mixture of relief and disappointment she felt.

"Ujinao-sama!" shouted Kotarou. "We need to do a favor for P.A. Oda here!"

But Ujinao could not respond to her. After all, her own senses could already see what Musashi would do now.

Musashi was flying along the coast of Kantou and they could make an attack which would affect Houjou, P.A. Oda, and Mouri.

...And they forcibly set this up by saying they wanted a friendly relationship with us!

Ujinao used the Shirasagi Castle's sight devices.

Atop the rectangular cloud of fog down below, someone launched an attack on the Shirasagi Castle.

The distance was about 2km.

The attack that covered that distance was not a god of war cannon blast.

Nor was it a shot from a Technohexen broom or a beam from their hunter shaman. The attack that would move the world came from...

“Mito Lord Nate Mitotsudaira!?”

Silver chains and great strength were used to swing something up and around at extremely high speed.

The silver wolf threw...

“One of our stone spikes!”

Mitotsudaira accelerated her entire body.

She poured speed into the silver chain she held in her hands and she ordered the silver chain itself to accelerate.

She gave her body a burst of speed and repeatedly accelerated within a radius of 30cm.

She seemed to be pursuing her hair as she swung it around.

...I look like a dog chasing its tail...!

But that amused her.

While this looked like a child’s game, she was confident this action would leave its mark on the history of the world. It amused her that she could sense that weight in her hands.

...After all...

Setting the world in motion might be surprisingly easy.

“Lu.”

Each time her vision sped up, she whirled around once more. That vision looked out to the Houjou stone spike held by the silver chain. She had caught one after “Musashi” had deflected it with a defense barrier.

“Lu lu lu.”

With a singsong howl, Mitotsudaira shifted her axis.

She tilted her heels, passed by where her king and the others were watching, and yet let her skirt flutter up while she stretched her arms and legs into the air as if to show off her entire body.

“Grr...”

She poured on the last burst of speed.

Her hair, body, and clothing pierced the wind and split the air.

“Lu...!”

She threw it.

In an instant, an explosion of water vapor appeared at the tip of the thrown stone spike and a great roar burst out.

Within the high altitude fog, Mitotsudaira exited her spin by landing on just her right heel.

“How about that!?”

On the Shirasagi Castle’s bridge, Acting Captain Takigawa Ichimasu had to make a decision.

“Lady Takigawa!”

The bridge looked deserted, but it was run by a covert ninja unit. Several Garudas and Djinnns ran around, carrying *insha kotob*, using spells, and disappearing.

But Takigawa crossed her arms at the back of the bridge.

“Now, then.”

What would she do about this pressing decision?

She had two options: defend against the enemy attack, or take the hit.

There was one thing she had to ask before deciding.

“Can our defense barrier stop that stone spike!?”

“Shaja! It can!”

I see, she thought while opening an *insha kotob* by her hands.

It displayed a simple map of the Far East showing the arrangement of P.A. Oda's primary Kinki forces. On there, she saw Shibata, Hashiba, Akechi, Sassa, Maeda, some others, and herself.

Most of them had taken up positions near Kinki. Shibata in particular had pulled back from his invasion of Sviet Rus and was returning to M.H.R.R.

But she was in Kantou.

At the moment, she was the only officer-class commander in Kantou. So...

...Should I defend this position with my life?

She considered it, but her decision did not take long.

She raised her right hand and gave her instructions.

Ujinao sensed Takigawa's decision as well as the result and beginning of everything.

The Shirasagi Castle took a direct hit from the stone spike.

After a thunderous noise, there was the great roar of the giant metal structure being struck.

The Shirasagi Castle took damage to...

...The bottom of the central ship's port bow.

The external hull had been pierced, but it would not have reached the internal hull. A warship of the Shirasagi Castle's class would be structured to eliminate the force of a blow between the external and internal hulls even if it was hit by an armor-piercing physical shell.

But damage to the external hull was a problem for an aerial ship. If they did not deal with it in some way, The Shirasagi Castle would be unable to make use of its high-speed cruising or ultra-high altitude ascent.

And...

"Ujinao-sama! A second one...!"

The information from the Shirasagi Castle's sight devices grew black.

The Musashi had launched a second stone spike into the sky.

And that second one had slammed into the Shirasagi Castle.

Takigawa inhaled.

Alarms blared within the Shirasagi Castle's bridge and central ship.

...That was my decision.

She had taken the hit without raising any defense barriers.

"Yes."

She faced forward without lowering her raised right hand.

The night sky lay in that direction, but the *insha kotob* on the front end of the bridge's ceiling displayed the Ariake down below.

She saw the Musashi group there.

Instead of looking down on them, she looked straight at them.

"Situation report."

"Shaja. We took hits to 2 locations on the bottom of the port bow. By using buffering spells, we can cruise at our semi-top speed and semi-greatest altitude. It will take 2 hours to fully repair the damage."

"We don't have that kind of time." Takigawa smiled. "Main cannon, other cannons, shift aim from Houjou to the Ariake."

"Lady Takigawa...!?"

Hearing that question, Takigawa waved her raised right hand forward.

"Sorry, everyone."

She laughed before continuing.

"I still have some desires. I want to stay with you all and I hope I can be involved with our master's end."

But...

“If they want us to be indebted to them, we need to show Musashi what exactly that means.”

“Lady Takigawa...”

An elderly voice rose from the center of the bridge. It spoke clearly.

“We shall accompany you.”

A few footsteps and presences moved to the center of the bridge. They lined up while unable to see each other.

“We volunteer...!”

“Shaja.”

Takigawa nodded. Then she raised her right hand and her voice.

“This ship shall now join the battle! Our enemy is the Ariake and the Musashi. We are fighting because they attacked us in Houjou’s place. Meaning...”

Meaning...

“I, Takigawa Ichimasu, and my subordinates shall begin the history recreation of the Battle of Kanagawa! Once this battle is over, we shall return to P.A. Oda and take up position as our master’s guardian!!”

Sounds of cannon fire raced out.

High in the sky, the white three-hull ship fired several times as many cannon blasts on the flat plane of white fog.

The sky became an expanse of great noise and the plane of fog became a garden of protective walls and the light of their shattering.

The three-hull ship had greater altitude.

But the white plane had far greater size.

And a single pair of eyes watched them. In the northwestern sky, a nine-tailed fox stood on a three-hull ship called the Yamagata Castle. She viewed the progress of the attack.

“They both have excellent resolve...!”

“Yoshiaki-sama! What do you mean, mon!?”

“Testament. The Musashi placed the future on the scales for all to see.”

Yoshiaki laughed from her throat.

...Not bad!

“There is another battle leading up to the Tensho Jingo Conflict fought between Houjou and Matsudaira. That is the Battle of Kanagawa in which Houjou drives out Takigawa Ichimasu who Oda sent in to observe them. So once they realized Takigawa’s Shirasagi Castle was monitoring them and sending information to Houjou, Musashi must have made a certain decision: Even if they pursued Houjou and attempted to start the Tensho Jingo Conflict, it might not count with Takigawa Ichimasu still around.”

But Houjou could not drive out Takigawa. After all, Houjou and P.A. Oda were currently allies, and...

...Houjou cannot make the first move with P.A. Oda and Hashiba’s forces in Edo.

If they betrayed that alliance, they could not complain about any retaliation they received.

“Hashiba likely gave thought to this. They intentionally used the southern route when sending the Azuchi to the invasion of Mouri in order to place Houjou in the middle.”

“And that’s why Houjou can’t attack Takigawa, mon?”

“If they can, it is only when Hashiba wants them to. While they control Houjou from Edo, they will defeat Mouri and then wait until the time is right for Nobunaga’s assassination. Only after that would they give Houjou permission to defeat Takigawa.” Yoshiaki narrowed her eyes and looked into the southern sky. “Until then, Matsudaira would have essentially been trapped inside Kantou.”

But now Takigawa had begun a battle with Musashi.

That battle had been begun by a single statement by Musashi’s Vice President.

“You wish to enter a friendly relationship with Houjou, hm? Those words

certainly have a wide range of interpretations.”

“Indeed,” said a voice.

It came from a sign frame that had opened by her side. It was from Date.

“Masamune? Is Yoshihime doing well?”

“Thanks to you. But about the Battle of Kanagawa that is beginning...”

“Testament. You understand, don’t you? ...Words are worth a thousand pieces of gold. Perhaps even 10 thousand or a million pieces.”

Musashi’s Vice President had concluded that Houjou could not attack Takigawa and then reached a certain decision.

“She decided they would ‘assist’ Houjou by attacking Takigawa as a separate unit.”

That was very vague, thought Masamune.

When Musashi’s Vice President had said they wished to enter a friendly relationship with Houjou, it had been a hope not supported by actual ability, so it had been easily written off as unimportant.

Musashi had used that vagueness to make an attack on Takigawa. They had meant it in a very specific way...

...They will take care of driving out Tachikawa Ichimasu as a sign of their friendship with Houjou.

And they had used a certain something to do that: Houjou’s stone spikes.

By declaring friendship with Houjou and then using Houjou’s own weapons, they were taking over Houjou’s driving out of Takigawa.

That held two meanings.

First...

Katakura-kun: “Musashi was able to measure whether or not Houjou viewed them in a friendly fashion and whether or not they wanted to drive out P.A. Oda! And when Takigawa brings the fight to them, Musashi can handle it

themselves to leave Houjou indebted to them! That's some nice wordless understanding! They show their intentions with their actions without speaking a word. Don't you think that's great, Masamune-kun!? You may never say you like me, but you can show it with your actions! C'mon, c'mon, bring it oooon!! ... Why won't you bring it on!? Why not!?"

"And the other reason is to search out Takigawa's true intentions, I suppose."

What a pain. Without Narumi and Oniniwa here, I have to deal with him more often, thought Masamune.

"Takigawa hesitated, didn't she?"

"P.A. Oda must be an excellent nation," said Yoshiaki over the divine transmission.

Masamune nodded. After all...

...Takigawa didn't have to take those stone spikes.

But she had done so anyway. And not just that...

"There was also a pause before the cannon fire."

She had hesitated. Because firing on Musashi could easily establish the Battle of Kanagawa.

...Even if it's no more than an empty claim from Musashi, it will cause sparks.

As long as she remained in Kantou, the Kantou and Oushuu forces could use "whether or not Musashi's attack counted as the Battle of Kanagawa" as a bargaining chip against Takigawa and the Edo Hashiba group.

Masamune would do the same.

It was a small chip when it came to the battles from after Nobunaga's assassination, but that would change if more forces accepted it as the Battle of Kanagawa.

Takigawa had likely hesitated because her role was to keep Musashi in Kantou.

"The vagueness of the Musashi Vice President's statement is a problem. If she had definitively stated that they *would* enter a friendly relationship with

Houjou, Takigawa would have ended it by saying Musashi was forcibly intervening.”

But that was not what had happened.

And so Takigawa had decided to start the Battle of Kanagawa. But...

“As you said, aunt, P.A. Oda must be an excellent nation.”

“Who is this aunt you speak of?”

“You are something of an older sister to my mother. Then again, my mother is apparently only 10 years old, so my aunt must be young too.”

“I like honest girls.” Yoshiaki laughed bitterly. “Takigawa must have decided to return to P.A. Oda.”

“But Takigawa...”

“Testament. According to the Testament, after Takigawa loses the Battle of Kanagawa and returns home, she joins the Battle of Shizugatake, but she loses again. After a cold reception from Hashiba, she joins the Battle of Komaki Nagakute, but loses after holing up in a castle and receiving no supplies. After that, the rest of her life is uneventful.”

Even so, Takigawa wished to return to P.A. Oda.

So...

“This will be the history recreation of the Battle of Kanagawa. This battle is the beginning of the end for Takigawa. If she understands that and wishes to return home, she will make it a triumphant return instead of a defeat. ...Let your guard down and you will be devoured, Musashi. After all, Takigawa’s position as an observer has given her the Urban Name of Demon Guardian.”

Amid the din of cannon fire, Takigawa ordered the engine division work team to fix the stone spikes in place where they had pierced the hull. At this point, the ship would have more stability with them fixed in place than trying to remove them and repair the damage.

She spoke her strategy to the ship secretary and had them hurry to write it

down and carry out the initial actions.

She also gave direct commands to place their personnel.

...Now I'm headed for the end of my enjoyable time as an active commander.

Once she returned to P.A. Oda, only defeats awaited her. She might be able to forcibly involve herself in other battles just to remain on the battlefield, but everyone had their own troops. So...

"This is the last real battlefield for me."

She placed her hand on the command platform and gave her orders.

"All hands, including the 4 accompanying ships, prepare to attack. ...The enemy is the Ariake and the Musashi down below. Sinking them both would be ideal. Our goal is to make a triumphant return to P.A. Oda."

Listen.

"Do not hold back. ...Do not hold back with yourself. Got that?"

Chapter 14: Divided Worrier

CHAPTER 14

"Divided Worrier"



Why? / Because
What for? / Because
Are you sure? / Because of that
Point Allocation (Empathy)

Why? / Because

What for? / Because

Are you sure? / Because of that

Point Allocation (Empathy)

“Huh? Takigawa started the Battle of Kanagawa!?”

A voice yelled within a large room colored by moonlight.

The room contained long tables lined with chairs. It was a dining hall. The windows gave a view of the moon and of the galley landing alongside this one.

Someone kicked the table. It was past dinner time and there were few people here, so the sound of struck wood reverberated loudly across the room.

Not caring that the few people there were focused on him, a boy with dark skin slammed his hand on the table.

“What is the meaning of this, Toshi!?”

“I can only say that Takigawa must have felt that was the only way to deal with the situation, Na-chan.”

“Calm down,” added Matsu.

“How can I calm down!? That battle is the turning point for Takigawa!!”

“And that’s why Maeda is telling you to calm down, Sassa.”

“Noooo. Matsu.”

Matsu clenched her fists and complained as a glasses girl sat in the next seat over while carrying some naan and cheese. She wore a track suit below a moonlit two-piece outfit and she turned toward Matsu.

“Oh, right. Matsu said it, not ‘Maeda’. Sorry.”

“I’ll forgive you.”

“Ha ha ha. Ma-chan is so cute.”

“You never change, do you, you idiot? And Fuwa, why are you sitting around

eating?”

“This is the dining hall.”

“Keh,” spat out Narimasa, but he did relax his body.

“Shibata’s forces are going to start their pre-summer break cleaning soon, so don’t go making a mess of things,” Fuwa said to him.

“Fuwa, Takigawa’s helped you out too, right?”

“Then what are we supposed to do?” Fuwa rubbed on a single bite’s worth of cheese and looked Sassa in the eye. “Run all the way there? We’re in M.H.R.R. Even if you manage something on par with Hashiba’s Great Return, it’ll still take more than an hour to get there.”

Fuwa followed up on her question with something different.

“You’re not really asking what we should do, are you? You’re asking how this could have happened. If you could just put it like that, we could actually hold a conversation.” She cut off a piece of the cheese with a knife. “But, well, the Testament doesn’t have you fighting on the same side as Takigawa from here on.”

“————”

“Look.” She rested her elbow on the table and opened a few maps and lists of dates on an *insha kotob*. “According to the Testament, when Takigawa returns from Kantou, she rebels against Hashiba because the Oda clan forces fall into her control after our master’s assassination. And as part of Shibata’s forces, she takes part in the anti-Hashiba showdown at the Battle of Shizugatake.”

“Shaja. And Shibata Katsuie commits suicide by his own sword. Takigawa Ichimasu retires.”

But...

“While you will be a part of Shibata’s forces, Sassa, you’ll be too busy dealing with Uesugi to do more than send a few of your own troops to the Battle of Shizugatake. ...And after that, you never again have the chance to fight under the same flag as Takigawa Ichimasu.”

Fuwa thought their master's assassination and the lack of unity between the Oda clan retainers afterwards were truly unfortunate.

...But I guess we all do have different backgrounds.

Those like her had been born in Oda regions, but Sassa had started out as a member of P.A. Oda's Mlasi forces and had only joined the Oda clan later.

The Oda clan was a meritocracy, so he had been readily appointed to an important position, but even if he had received a warm welcome, a foreigner like him had needed to build his resolve and keep the proper distance when joining.

During that time, Takigawa had maintained a relaxed atmosphere around him without ruining her image as an upperclassman and Shibata had looked after him from a position of superiority from the beginning.

...People like that are probably good for people like Sassa who want to be accepted from the outside.

He was short-tempered, but he must have had a good upbringing because he could be reasoned with if you tried. She just wished he would use his inquiring mind in a more positive way, but...

"You can be so dumb, Sassa."

"What the hell do you mean by that?"

"You react too much to what's right in front of you. ...Besides, the fact that you won't share the battlefield with Takigawa is hardly new information. You're only upset now because this is the beginning of her decline, but that's none of your business. ...It's not like the two of you share your lives. You're just another underclassman to her. I'm sure you feel indebted to her after she helped you out in the past, but you're empathizing with her too much and turning it into a huge deal, y'see?"

"D-damn you. That 'y'see' at the end really pisses me off..."

She did not care. And if he was pissed off, that was all the more reason to say it.

"Takigawa knew what it meant to go to Kantou, but she did it anyway, y'see?"

...You don't have to like it, but wanting to save her is nothing more than arrogance. You'd be robbing her of the decision she bet the rest of her life on."

"What good is going there if I can't say what I really think?"

"Can you take responsibility for Takigawa's life? If you did that, you'd make an enemy of everyone who worked really hard on the history recreations that Takigawa went to Kantou for. And we're the Testament Union right now."

Saying that reminded Fuwa of something.

...Oh, so that's it.

That was what Musashi was doing. They had done it when they saved their princess at Mikawa and they had done it when they saved Mary Stuart at England. They had been prepared to make an enemy of everyone.

...So that's it...

Fuwa realized that Sassa had a very Musashi-like mentality.

He would later join forces with Matsudaira at Komaki Nagakute, but...

"Hmm..."

She groaned to herself while thinking he might be more honest with himself there than he was here.

He could have trouble when it came to handling his emotions.

So she made sure to say it.

"Besides, Takigawa Ichimasu is skilled enough to be counted among Oda's Four Heavenly Kings, so Hashiba will use her as well and she'll fight in the Battle of Komaki Nagakute, the direct confrontation between Hashiba and Matsudaira. ...But Takigawa Ichimasu loses to Matsudaira there. And her life is only downhill afterwards. ...She never wins another battle after losing at the Battle of Kanagawa."

But...

"That's only according to the Testament. Interpretations can deal with that. You'll be an enemy by then, Sassa, but will you hold back when you face her?"

"...No."

“Then there’s your answer. You’re both the same there.”

And...

“Sassa, you don’t have time to be worrying about others, do you?”

A short silence followed that question.

But Narimasa spoke up as if to drive it out as a nuisance.

“What do you mean?”

Don’t act like you don’t know, thought Fuwa with a nasal breath. Then she opened a new *insha kotob* at the tip of her knife. It displayed a simple map of Kyushu.

“Well, if you insist. Sassa, can you look at this objectively?”

The battle was underway in Kantou, but they had to focus on the more immediate problem.

...I have a short-term viewpoint, too.

Fuwa manipulated the display with that in mind.

“This is the current situation in Kyushu.”

The map of Kyushu quickly filled with black. That contained the marker for M.H.R.R.

“This is what Hashiba controls. Before conquering K.P.A. Italia, Hashiba took care of the Kyushu Campaign which had its foundation in allying herself with Kyushu. Sassa, you and the others took part in that from M.H.R.R., right?”

“That’s right,” confirmed Maeda. “The Kyushu Campaign was a flag toward triggering the Bunroku Campaign that used Kyushu as a foothold. Hashiba’s forces are only able to invade Kantou now because we divided our forces and recreated Hashiba’s Kyushu Campaign. So...”

So...

“Na-chan, Takigawa can only do her thing in Kantou because we carried out the Kyushu Campaign and created the foothold for invading Edo. It isn’t like we

haven't done anything for her."

"I know that. Shut up."

"Yes, yes. As long as you understand."

Fuwa nodded and looked straight at Sassa using the eyes behind her glasses.

"Now, about you."

Listen.

"Since you've completed the Kyushu Campaign, Sassa, you're near the end of your history recreation. The Kyushu Campaign was completed in advance, so there isn't much left for your time on the battlefield."

"Shaja."

Narimasa reached out and manipulated her *insha kotob*.

It displayed the bottom of Hokuriku, between Kantou and Kinki.

"All I have left are my two battles before the Kyushu Campaign: the Hashiba-Matsudaira showdown at the Battle of Komaki Nagakute and the Battle of Suemori Castle following that. There, I join Matsudaira as Hashiba's enemy and then fight and lose to Toshi who acts on Hashiba's behalf. ...The Testament says I'm given Higo after the Kyushu Campaign, fail, and am ordered to commit suicide, but this here is effectively the last thing for me." He turned a sharp gaze Fuwa's way from below his sunglasses. "But what of it? I'm well aware I don't have much time left. Given what battles I have left, I'll rebel against Hashiba with Shibata at the Battle of Shizugatake and then fight the Battles of Komaki Nagakute and Suemori Castle. ...What does any of that matter? Hmm?"

"What kind of idiot tries to intimidate a girl?"

"Idiot! Idiot!" repeated Matsu.

"Shut up. It's a bad habit!"

"Everyone loves you for having an actual explanation, Na-chan."

Sassa walked angrily around the table to reach Toshiie, but Toshiie crouched down and crab-walked around the table to keep his distance.

After a full rotation, Sassa came to a stop.

“What are you trying to say with all this, Fuwa?”

“I kind of understand why you’re worried about Takigawa.”

That being...

“The battle of Komaki Nagakute is Takigawa’s final battle according to the Testament. And since we’ve already done the Kyushu Campaign, the Battle of Suemori Castle that happens right after the Battle of Komaki Nagakute will be your final battle. ...You’ll both finish your roles at about the same time.”

That’s so like Na-chan, thought Toshiie.

No, this may be more like Takigawa, he added.

When Narimasa had joined P.A.M. long ago, he had been fairly touchy, but it had been Shibata who had knocked him down a notch and Takigawa who had looked after him while maintaining her dignity as an upperclassman.

But those two upperclassmen were going to retire as students one after another.

None of them had ever thought about graduation. They had just assumed the important people above them would support them and guide them.

But history marched ever onward. A lot of it was resolved through interpretations, but things generally followed the Testament descriptions. That was especially true of nations blessed with skilled people that stood on the main stage of history.

Narimasa understood that intellectually and had lived accordingly, but...

...Our role ends with the Kyushu Campaign.

Thanks to the attack on Uesugi, their job had ended early. Everyone involved in the third attack there had held a party with those who would remain to fight and negotiate another day.

At the time, Toshiie had realized he would never see some of those people again.

“ ... ”

Narimasa had likely learned there that he was with some people he would never see again and that he would soon be one of those people the others would never see again.

...And it's happening for him after Shibata and at the same time as Takigawa.

So...

"Na-chan, your last battle will be against me. Since we're telling you not to worry about Takigawa here, I should also tell you not to hold back with me."

"Yeah, you do love your money."

"Testament," replied Toshiie. "We knew up front what we would lose, but I still want to avoid losing it if I can."

"You sound like Musashi," said Narimasa as he sat down.

Similarly, everyone else in the dining hall breathed a sigh of relief. That was partially due to their fear of Narimasa, but...

...They must also be worried for all of us.

Meanwhile, Narimasa crossed his arms behind his head and spoke.

"All my focus on things I've lost has already been used up on my little sister. I might lose some others, but none of them can mean more than her, so they don't matter. But..."

But...

"If it looks like we're gonna lose something, I end up wanting to see if we can do something about it right up to the very end. ...That's all."

"...Sassa."

"I said that's all, idiot. ...What's that smile for, Toshi?"

"Well, Na-chan, that's just not fair at all."

A bitter laugh escaped Toshiie and something else suddenly came to mind.

"But...what about Musashi's Chancellor?"

"He's hopeless. He's too careless and lacks any tension at all. ...We're talking about people that'll do comedy routines on the battlefield, remember?"

“But we lost to them at Novgorod.”

“We withdrew,” corrected Narimasa.

...Come to think of it, that’s right.

With a mental “most likely”, he decided Musashi must be enjoying themselves on the battlefield displayed on his *lernen figur*.

His group was enjoying themselves too, but Musashi lacked something they had.

...A focus on destruction and an atmosphere steeped in impatience and anger.

When your inherited name leads you to a history recreation of destruction or failure, you definitely feel impatience and anger, thought Toshiie.

But Musashi lacked that. They seemed to pass from incident to incident through idiocy and laughter. They had to have lost a lot during the Battle of Mikatagahara, but...

...The information we received from Sanada says they didn’t really change even with all that anxiety.

That had been an act.

That meant they were not true idiots. They believed they would have a future if they worked to remain cheerful even when painful things happened. That had likely become a habit for them, and more importantly...

“Musashi’s Chancellor is probably an excellent example for them.”

The provisional rule had taken away Musashi’s rights and their position as a proper nation, so they had become a gathering place for the other nations’ outcasts.

To put it another way, they were a home for those without a future.

An incompetent Chancellor and Student Council President had historically been chosen for that country on the precipice.

They would have originally been choosing an incompetent figurehead, but that gradually shifted toward choosing an incompetent entertainer, which led

to the current Chancellor and President.

Since they had no future, that nation had to put on an act of strength and they were ruled by a smiling idiot.

To put it another way...

“Since there are times when things won’t go well even with the best of efforts, they’ve decided to take it seriously but not think too deeply about it and remain carefree.”

That was the Musashi style.

It did not mean they were not serious. It just meant they did not focus on those things as much. And...

“Since they’re taking it seriously, they’re fine with smiling, losing, and putting on an act of strength when loss is inevitable.”

...What a twisted bunch.

But that was the pride of someone without a future. Even if they lost everything when they lost, they could smile because they had taken it seriously and they could say they hadn’t really lost because their tough spirit had not been broken.

And when that happened, they would hide their grim expression and do silly things so they would feel no regret.

...Is this...?

Toshiie had heard of a similar ideology before. Fuwa would have as well.

It was...

“————”

“What is it, Toshi?”

Narimasa spoke to his colleague who had suddenly fallen silent and looked down.

After a pause, Toshiie responded.

“Oh, nothing.”

He turned Fuwa’s *insha kotob* toward himself.

“Umm.” He placed a hand on his forehead. “What do you think it means to live without regret?”

“That’s a question for Shibata.”

Why is he asking about something people are always telling him? wondered Narimasa.

“That idiot enjoys every single day and lives life to its fullest.”

Toshiie would normally have said “Yes, he does” in response.

But he did not. He instead turned the *insha kotob* toward Narimasa.

“...Let’s watch.”

He got up from his seat and sat at the foot of the table to be between Narimasa and Fuwa.

Then he spoke quietly.

“What is going on here? ...I want to ask Takigawa once she gets back.”

They could see the light of cannon fire on the screen.

And Toshiie looked like he was trying to stare straight through it.

“We have resolve, but we might lack acceptance.”

The Kantou sky was full of light.

The source of the light was simple. First, the high-speed ship called the Shirasagi Castle scattered accelerated ether light while circling around the Ariake. By firing towards the Ariake inside that circle, it forced the Ariake to open many defense barriers and fortify their defenses as those barriers shattered.

A band of light flew in a large circle in the sky and light sprayed from the rooftop receiving that attack.

The Ariake had removed its stealth barrier. That allowed them to fully open

their defense barriers and defend against the Shirasagi Castle's attack.

But that attack was dense and constant.

By including the 4 additional attack ships into the attack rotation, the three-hull ship alternated between its port ship, center ship, starboard ship, and accompanying ships as it attacked and shattered that light against the Ariake. But...

"Will this work!?"

A voice spoke from atop the Ariake.

At the same time, something lined up on the Ariake.

They were defense barriers created by "Ariake".

The line of barriers took form around the top of the Ariake with the perfect number and pattern to fully block the Shirasagi Castle's attack.

"Finally...!"

A god of war firing unit was protecting the damaged armor on the southwest corner of the Ariake. They swapped out the magazines attached to their muzzle-loading rapid-fire flintlock guns.

They were switching from defense barrier ammunition to anti-ship ammunition.

"Fire once your shot is in range!" said Naomasa as their commander.

"Judge!"

They began firing.

Naomasa also opened a sign frame linked to Jizuri Suzaku's sight devices and narrowed down the sight.

"Fire...!"

She fired too.

Their shots were vastly outnumbered by the enemy's, but...

Novice: "Don't rush this. If we're defending against their shells, we can't fire

back directly along their line of fire. If you aren't used to firing with this kind of height difference, aim for the base of their bridge. Try to avoid targeting the side of their hull because they're prepared to take fire there."

Four Eyes: "Did you read that in a book?"

Novice: "Wh-what's wrong with that!? This is the time to show off that kind of knowledge and make it useful! If you get that, then hold your tongue!"

Four Eyes: "Ah ha ha. ...So you can use that tone with me, Toussaint?"

Almost Everyone: "Eeek!"

Regardless, their firing accuracy was not perfect. Even if it was a large ship, it was hard to hit something moving so quickly.

"Ignore it when it circles behind us! Fire thrice when it's passing from west-southwest to south-southeast! That's your quota!"

Asama: "Sorry, Masa. My Konoha-based targeting program is still experimental, so I've only put your data in there..."

Smoking Girl: "Yeah, I'm taking that into consideration. I'll send you feedback, so get it in order ASAP. I can get by with a normal one."

But as they fired, the god of war firing unit exchanged a glance regarding the previous command.

"U-um, which way is southwest-west...?"

"It's that way! Um, the direction with the stars shining in the heavens. Yes, that definite light over there."

"Oh, hey! You're the head of the Kepler-style astronomy club 'Kepler with a Running Start'!"

"Can I get an answer to which way that is!?"

No two of them seemed to have the same standard for interpreting it.

Naomasa had no choice but to send Asama a request to have direction marker sign frames displayed around the Ariake. They were hard to see from the corner, but they would help more than just her unit.

But as they continued attacking and counterattacking, Naomasa realized

something.

...It's the same?

She sensed a pattern to the enemy's cannon fire.

Smoking Girl: "Someone, what is Takigawa's objective in this battle?"

Silver Wolf: "O-okay! We're in a hurry, so I'll answer! Um, Takigawa's objective should be the destruction of the Musashi and the Ariake. After all, the Battle of Kanagawa happens immediately after Nobunaga's assassination. Completing it will be a Kantou-side flag toward that assassination. So Takigawa cannot afford to leave the Musashi and the Ariake unharmed now that she's started it."

Wise Sister: "In other words, it'll feel great if we can win here!"

Asama: "Just to be safe, why exactly is that?"

Wise Sister: "We'll be in ecstasy, our excitement will be through the roof, our mood will be better than ever, and we won't be able to stop smiling. And when we're praised for it, Mitotsudaira will piss herself in joy, Asama will wiggle around in her heart, Horizon will give a thumbs up, and the great wise sister will begin a constant full-count fever time! Delicious!"

Silver Wolf: "That doesn't explain anything and I don't like what you slipped into the middle there!"

Hori-ko: "Do you do that too, Mitotsudaira-sama?"

Silver Wolf: "Eh? W-well, I've never tried it..."

"Ah, no. Dear, just because I'm always on the attack and my defense and evasion levels are in negative territory is no reason to start up with that petting skill of yours. Do it too much and I'll overload with happiness and do something indecent. Ah, no, doooooon't stop. Yes, there, there. Yes, yes, yes. Let's go all the way! I'll make sure to pay you back plenty afterwards."

Silver Wolf: “I...th-think that shouldn’t be a problem.”

Mal-Ga: “I’m making so much progress on this storyboard!”

Flat Vassal: “I-isn’t it a little soon for that?”

Gold Mar: “Ga-chan, we’re in a battle right now, so maybe you should keep that to yourself.”

Mal-Ga: “What are you talking about, Margot? If you can have fun making a doujinshi while waging war or do nothing while disinterestedly waging war, isn’t the former the better option!?”

Gold Mar: “I meant that mentioning it might make them run away. And the Chancellor might focus on it and start doing unnatural things.”

When everyone looked over, the idiot swung his body left and right and then twisted his hips.

Mal-Ga: “I can’t do that, Margot... This is a competition. I mustn’t spy on them. And it’s the artist’s job to find the true actions hidden behind the unnatural ones.”

Uqui: “Well said.”

Unturning: “The scary part is that this is all the response that gets in Musashi...”

Novice: “But now...can we get back on topic? Yes. It would be bad for Takigawa if she stops Musashi here. It would be much better for her if she returned to P.A. Oda, received backup, and recovered her position.”

Obscene: “Why doesn’t she do that? She must feel lonely striking back on her own like this!”

Sticky King: “That’s right! We are the friends of lonely children! Let’s go help her!”

Bell: “Sh-she’s an...adult. I...think?”

Obscene: “Really? Well, if she’s an adult, she can go it alone!”

Sticky King: “But she mustn’t forget to have the courage to let us know if she’s in pain!”

Vice President: “When did this turn into a counseling session? Anyway, Neshinbara, do you have anything to say?”

Novice: “Oh, yes, judge. ...Takigawa is trying to stop Musashi because...um, what was it? Oh, right. P.A. Oda has shifted toward their attack on Mouri, so she doesn’t want to cause them any trouble. And by wearing us down, she can rob us of the power to interfere with Hashiba as they head off to Mouri.”

Neshinbara sighed before continuing.

Novice: “So Takigawa needs to wear us down enough that we can’t take our next action. On the other hand, we can earn a debt from Mouri by wearing her down here. It’s obvious she’ll be sent to Mouri when she withdraws from Kantou, after all. So in a way, Takigawa wants the same thing we do here.”

Smoking Girl: “If we can endure this, we’ll have forced them to consume ammunition and fuel. And if we’re fine afterwards, we can sell our name and make P.A. Oda look less powerful. That’s enough for us.”

But...

“I doubt it’ll be that easy...!”

As soon as he said that, a change occurred in the sky.

There were now two Shirasagi Castles.

“It copied itself...!?”

Naomasa frowned at the image from the sign frame synced with the sight devices.

There were now two Shirasagi Castles, but this was not Techno Magie or anything of the sort.

“The ship split apart, didn’t it!!?”

“Judge!” shouted the student in charge of observation. “The entire Shirasagi fleet has split in two and is moving apart!”

The Shirasagi castle had split into two groups. One contained the central ship

and the 4 accompanying ships. The other contained the port and starboard ships.

The central ship's group accelerated over to the opposite side of the Ariake from the port and starboard ships.

They kept up the speed of their circle around the Ariake and continued firing.

"This is 'Ariake' with a request. ...Evacuate the upper surface! This surpasses the number of available defense barriers! Over."

The number of shells had changed.

Before, the three-hull ship and 4 single-hull ships had set up a rotation, but now they were using a double rotation between the two groups. And they took opposite positions while flying in a large circle around the Ariake.

"Shells incoming...! Over."

Chapter 15: Pursued Idiot on the Stage

CHAPTER 15

"Pursued Idiot on the Stage"



You're chased
You're pursued
It never ends

Point Allocation (Requires Effort)

You're chased

You're pursued

It never ends

Point Allocation (Requires Effort)

The Ariake was hit by a circling bombardment far too exacting and fast to simply call it a pincer attack.

Because the defense barriers were following a pattern, it took longer to respond. Also...

“The Shirasagi Castle is breaking its pattern...!”

The previous well-ordered movements were gone.

The attacks seemed almost random, but they still targeted specific spots atop the Ariake. The 2 ships generally circled around above the Ariake, and...

“Don’t get caught between them! Then you can’t escape!”

They would cross over, pursue each other, and look out to each other as they circled and kept their distance.

All the while, the delayed defense barriers were shattered and the upper armor scattered fragments.

The destruction was so unilateral because the god of war sniper unit had withdrawn.

There was currently no one to fire into the sky.

“Horizon!”

Mitotsudaira used her silver chains to grab an armor panel from a materials storage zone and held it up to protect them.

“Can’t you use Lype Katathlipse?”

“She can’t!” shouted Neshinbara as he ran among the landing shells. “Its effective range is 3km! If it doesn’t move closer, we can’t hit the whole Shirasagi Castle! They know that and Ariadust-kun hasn’t practiced firing on a

moving target anyway!”

“That is true. I have not grown obsessed with target practice the way Asama-sama has.”

“No, um, I haven’t, uh...”

“Now, now,” said Horizon despite the line of shells landing behind her. “Besides, it is all for naught if I miss. The Muneshige Cannon is the Muneshige Cannon because it is so easily blocked. But if it misses entirely, that would be my mistake instead.”

“Master Muneshige! Master Muneshige!”

Then a crossdresser walked over.

“Hey, hey, hey. Wait, all of you. ‘Ariake’ said to evacuate, so aren’t we gonna do that?”

“Oh, that’s right. I just got distracted because someone was saying things about-...”

Asama trailed off.

Everyone watched as a line of crashing shells approached from behind the crossdresser.

And seeing that...

“You idiot! Behind you! Behind you!”

The idiot tilted his head when everyone yelled at him.

“Huh? I’m not imperial boy, so I don’t have a see-through little girl following me around.”

The idiot laughed as he ran and the shellfire fragments changed course to show they were definitely tracking him. The shellfire had been wandering randomly before, but now it pursued him, which meant it was on a direct course for the rest of them. So first of all, Horizon spoke.

“Toori-sama.”

“Eh? Horizon!? What is it!? Feeling lonely!?”

Horizon began to sweat as if she was restraining herself in some way and she turned back toward the others.

“Um, everyone, I really want to shoot this boy with Maska Orge right now, but should I? Your options are ‘yes’ and ‘of course’.”

“Those are the same thing!”

Mitotsudaira snatched up Horizon with a silver chain and set off running. Next, everyone else screamed and ran across the rooftop. First, Asama turned toward Mitotsudaira.

“Nice one, Mito! So where should we evacuate to!?”

“Ehh!? I-I don’t know! This is only my second time up here!”

“Oh, I know! There’s a duct over here!”

With that, Neshinbara rolled into the duct hole to escape all on his own.

Naruze’s eyebrows rose.

“What a coward! ...So what’s this, Tenzou? Are you carrying Mary in the hopes I’ll draw you?”

“N-no, I-I...!”

“Hee hee. It might be an emergency, but I’m sure Lady Naruze can manage. We’re probably not looking our best, but please do.”

“You’re incredible, Ma-yan...” said Naito as Muneshige looked to Gin.

“Gin, if you are having any difficulty, just tell me.”

“I am.”

She answered in record time.

“You are?”

“I am.”

“Then if you’ll excuse me.”

Muneshige lightly scooped up Gin. And then...

“...We’ll be going on ahead!”

Girls: “Ohh...”

Muneshige ran out ahead and led the way for the others. Gin observed their surroundings from his arms and sent Asama data on the Shirasagi Castle’s movements and the pursuing line of shellfire.

And they heard the idiot shouting from far behind them.

“Hey, hey, wait! Why are you all running from me!?”

They all looked back and saw the shellfire catching up. And that meant it was getting closer to the idiot. They all poured even more energy into their dash, but Naruze spoke up while making her sketch.

“Stay away from us! Get any closer and I’ll shoot!”

“Kiyonari, should she really say to that to him?”

“It might seem strange, but this much is normal.”

“Is this any time to be calmly introducing her to the Musashi rules!?” shouted Mitotsudaira.

“You leave me no choice!”

One of them waved both arms to create a space for herself.

It was Kimi. She opened the front of her white track suit and pointed back behind her brother.

“Foolish brother! Could you look behind you for just a moment!?”

“Eh? What is it, sis!?”

The idiot looked back to the right, but since they had all just made a left turn, he was looking to the outside corner. The line of shellfire was on the inside corner.

“Hey, wait! There’s nothing there, sis!”

“Kimi! Kimi! Please just tell Toori-kun the truth! Horizon can’t hold back much longer, so she’s sweating like crazy!”

“Very well.” Kimi turned a full-faced smile toward her brother. “Heh heh. ...

You fell for it, foolish brother! We're all playing tag! Boobs tag! We're playing boobs tag! And since I was 'it' last, um, a flat chest! Yes, you're 'it' until you manage to grope a flat chest!"

"I know you like causing trouble, but you don't have to lie to him now of all times!"

"Mito! Mito! Let Toori-kun grope you to get the shells to pursue you instead! Horizon can't hold back much longer, so she's sweating like crazy!"

"J-just so you know, I'm inside Raging Beast, so you can't grope me! I'm safe!"

Bell: "Th-then m-me...?"

When they heard Suzu's comment, they all looked to Mitotsudaira.

"...Mito, you heard Suzu-san, didn't you?"

"Heh heh. Even Suzu is willing to do what it takes."

"Yes," added Naruze. "I'm technically part of that caste, but after hearing what Suzu said, I think you should handle this, Mitotsudaira."

"What are any of you talking about!? Why are we even playing by boobs tag rules!?"

"And why're all of you running away from meeeeeee!?"

Just as the idiot said that, the shellfire sped up and the color gold scattered through the sky.

The end of the idiot's wig had been hit.

"Eh?"

He finally noticed and actually looked behind him. And...

"Ohwaaaahhh!!"

He ran full speed toward the others who briefly flinched back, but...

"Waaahhh!"

They dashed across the Ariake.

“Takigawa-sama! The 2nd unit says they have spotted Musashi’s Chancellor!”

“He’s on top of the Ariake, isn’t he?”

“Shaja!” confirmed the divine transmission navigator’s voice in the seemingly empty bridge. “He is apparently crossdressing to escape our notice! Further information should arrive soon!”

“I see... A disguise that doesn’t rely on spells, hm? It’s true the disguises these days are instantly noticeable because they use spells for everything.”

Takigawa nodded a few times.

“But ninjas like us are experts at disguise. He may be an entertainer, but he picked a fight with the wrong people. ...You have permission to fire so he doesn’t get hooked on this. If we do defeat Musashi’s Chancellor it will help with this battle and greatly reduce the burden on P.A. Oda.”

So...

“If you can finish him off, don’t just make him dance.”

Naito thought to herself as everyone screamed and ran.

...I’m such a good sport.

She had no real reason to run along with the others. After all, she had wings. But if it came down to it...

...I want to save anyone who can’t escape in time.

But at the moment, the idiot had just realized the truth behind him.

“Ohhhhhh! Hey! Listen, everyone! Please do something about this!”

“Ah ha ha ha! Margot, look, look! He’s really panicking!”

“Ga-chan, you’re so full of energy tonight.”

But it was true the crossdresser was in considerable trouble. So Kimi looked back his way while maintaining a slight lead.

“Listen, foolish brother! The enemy is firing at you because you’re Musashi’s Chancellor and Student Council President!”

“Oh, is that why!? So they saw through my crossdressing? Nooo!”

“H-Horizon-sama... Should I cut him?” asked Futayo. “Toori-kun! Toori-kun! Please stop provoking us! Now two people are sweating like crazy because they can’t hold back much longer!”

“Listen!” said Kimi. “Listen, foolish brother! There is one way of changing this situation!”

“There is, Kimi-chan?”



“Judge! Foolish brother! They figured out who you are because they saw through your crossdressing! So you need to move in a more feminine way, as if saying, ‘I’m a girl, not the Chancellor’!”

The idiot wiggled back and forth in an over-exaggerated girly run.

“Noooooooo! Namako can’t go oooooon!”

Piloting and fire control data were passed back and forth within the Shirasagi Castle’s bridge.

“Takigawa-sama! The 2nd unit is shouting ‘unforgivable’!!”

“Tell them not to get distracted!”

“Shaja!” replied the unseen ninja as the cannon blasts pursued the idiot down below.

“Noooooooo!”

Naito watched the idiot twist his legs inward as he ran from the pursuing shellfire.

...He really is an entertainer...

It was impressive. And when she thought about it, Musashi did tend to select an incompetent Chancellor and President, but...

...That’s not required by law and there’s no real reason it has to be an entertainer.

But when she imagined it, the answer was obvious.

Mal-Ga: “Compare an obedient kind of incompetence to this idiot and it’s obvious which one is more harmful to Musashi.”

Asama: “W-wait, Naruze. Let’s not say anything mean. Toori-kun supplies ether for our spells and he doesn’t do all that stuff on the battlefield because he wants-...”

Me: “Oh, no! All this running has caused my dummy boobs (XXL size) to slip

out of place! Asama! You got some tape or something!?”

Asama: “He is doing it because he wants to, isn’t he!? Isn’t he!? ...Oh, and I don’t have any tape, but I do have a fixation spell meant to hold cargo in place. Use that instead.”

Girls: “She’s hopeless...”

But after fixing his boobs, the idiot added a running skip to his step to jiggle the dummies.

“Sis! Sis! Like this!? Like this!?”

“Heh heh heh! Foolish brother! Excellent job! You look cute. Nice! Nice one!”

“Ah, Mito too!? Restrain yourself! Restrain yourself!”

The idiot and his sister laughed together.

They really are amazing, thought Naito. *In any other nation, this level of inappropriate behavior would probably get you executed,* she added. But then the idiot looked behind him again.

“Oh!? Waaaaaahhh!”

The shellfire pursuing him quickly sped up.

The enemy probably could not restrain themselves any longer.

And in that instant...

...Judge!

Naito raised her broom and fired a shot.

It was a coin signal round with an optical coloration spell added in. Instead of targeting the enemy, she was sending a signal.

“Masa-yan! Start shooting!!”

“Leave it to us!”

Naomasa and the rest of the god of war sniper unit targeted the Shirasagi Castle’s 2nd unit.

The Shirasagi Castle's port and starboard ships were flying around the Ariake and firing on the idiot, so now was the time to return fire. After all...

...By guiding the idiot, we've gathered the enemy shellfire into a single line!

The scary part was how it really looked like they were only shouting and running away from their ally. The dangerous part was how the idiot was entirely unaware he was the bait.

Novice: "The more natural the bait, the easier the enemy falls for it!!"

What kind of academy would use their Chancellor and President as bait?

...This kind, I suppose.

She wanted to deny the reality before her eyes, but she could not.

Everyone was turning a corner as they ran around the center of the Ariake. The Shirasagi Castle's 2nd unit was aiming for the idiot, so from a corner of the Ariake...

"It looks like they're distracted...!"

Of course, the enemy was not stupid. The secondary cannons were firing toward the god of war sniper unit even though the main cannons were busy chasing the idiot. But...

"The Ariake will provide defense barriers! Over."

"Ariake" specifically chose not to defend the line of fire pursuing the idiot. She ignored that, despite the armor the shellfire was tearing up, and she sent the defense barriers Naomasa's way instead.

That allowed the gods of war to target the Shirasagi Castle's port and starboard ships from behind the barriers.

Smoking Girl: "Asama-chi...!"

Asama: "I've already sent it to all of your people, Masa! I added the feedback you gave me into the targeting spell you're using! Although I was in a hurry, so it's exclusively tuned for the Shirasagi Castle."

The surrounding gods of war nodded wordlessly. Sign frames with the Asama Shrine logo appeared in front of their sight devices and they already said "lock

acquired”.

So Naomasa raised her voice as a response to Asama.

“And...kaboom!!”

She fired.

“What did I just say!?”

Takigawa shouted in the Shirasagi Castle’s bridge.

“Take evasive action, 2nd unit! Hard to starboard!”

The divine transmission carried her voice as-is.

When she looked out into the sky from the bridge, she could see 2 white forms beyond the Ariake.

Those were the Shirasagi Castle’s port and starboard ships. Both of them were hurriedly taking evasive action away from the Ariake. They had done so before her command reached them, so they must have sensed the danger and responded on their own.

...They can dodge the enemy’s shells!

The Shirasagi Castle was a high-speed ship. However, the distribution of thrust could be changed to match the situation, so it could make high-mobility maneuvers if need be.

The 2 ships of the 2nd unit were doing exactly that. They had been maneuvering at standard speed, but they had forcibly changed direction, causing white fog to trail behind them.

A great mass could be heard colliding with the wind. For just a moment, the wind blew through the night sky like a thin, white wall.

And the white mist exploded again beyond the Ariake.

The port and starboard ships had reached their evasive trajectories.

“Shaja!” someone yelled on the bridge, but Takigawa saw something else.

The port and starboard ships were covered in fog beyond the Ariake, but the

port one, which was located closer to them, had a color to it.

That color was vermilion.

The color was wrapped in light and surrounded by black smoke.

“They were too late...!?”

An explosion erupted below the bridge on the port side of the port ship.

“Yes...!”

Ujinao smiled bitterly when Kotarou raised a celebratory cheer within the Houjou fleet.

Kotarou quickly placed a hand over her mouth when she realized what she had said.

“I-I was not referring to the damage to the Shirasagi Castle. U-um, just now on the TV *tokusatsu* drama Fierce Monk Shugenger, they defeated the enemy imperial court monster.”

“Oh, is that so? You have that much focus to spare in the middle of battle, Kotarou?” Ujinao turned to face the northeastern sky. “Musashi outdid the Shirasagi Castle by using one group just to take aim instead of having them all fire. That probably improved the Ariake’s morale. The Shirasagi Castle will have to move their 2nd unit further out and their firing rate will fall by about 37%. ... But in reality, the Ariake is in a far worse position here.”

“Really?”

“Testament. The enemy has more cannons than them and guiding the shellfire with their Chancellor has left their upper armor badly damaged. Our Descending Light Bombs and the later attacks have reached the tertiary armor in places, so this will likely be determined by how well they can defend using the classified sector below the armor. Do you know what method the Ariake should use here?”

“They should-...”

“Ascend.”

“No fair saying it before I can!” shouted Kotarou, but Ujinao gave her a smile and continued speaking.

“Have you forgotten, Kotarou? With the Musashi inside, the Ariake cannot ascend any further.”

“Oh! That’s right! In that case, the Ariake should definitely-...”

“Use their stealth to hide and then either move or turn. By using the stealth to hide the locations of the damage to their upper armor, they can move and prevent any attacks from piercing their armor except for by coincidence.”

“No fair again!” shouted Kotarou, but Ujinao gave her another smile.

“Yes, I do not play fair.”

“That’s not an excuse or an explanation, Ujinao-sama...” said Kotarou. “But even if they try to use their stealth now...Takigawa-sama will have a way of preventing that, won’t she?”

“Kotarou, that is the question I wanted answered.”

Just as Kotarou said “testament”, 1 of the 4 ships accompanying the Shirasagi Castle’s central ship flew over the Ariake and joined the port and starboard ships.

It seemed to be supporting the damaged port ship, but...

“That is not why it is there. While it is providing support, it is also preventing the Ariake from using its stealth. Please watch,” said Kotarou. “For Takigawa-sama, this may be a chance to readjust the makeup of her ships, but this will be a crucial battle for those on the Ariake.”

The shellfire continued.

But now the downpour of metal only came from the Shirasagi Castle’s 1st unit.

The rain did not end, but it was weaker.

Novice: “Normally, I would want to activate the stealth and make our next move now. But...”

Tonbokiri: “That would not be possible, would it?”

Futayo lightly spread her arms while positioning herself in front of Horizon.

She was viewing 3 people in front of her.

“Some enemies jumped down from that ship that flew over just now.”

She asked them a question.

“Who are you?”

“Testament,” said the tall and skinny one.

He bit off a piece of the fuse wrapped around his wrist and lit the piece in his mouth.

“Sanada Academy. ...Unneeded #10, Kakei Juuzou.”

“The same,” said a woman with a fan-shaped sword in each hand. The kabuki makeup around her eyes grew more relaxed. “#7. ...Unno Rokurou.”

Next was the person standing next to Unno who removed their white hooded cloak.

“#9. ...Mochizuki Yukitada.”

She was a maid automaton wearing a Far Eastern summer uniform.

Kakei spoke on behalf of the 3.

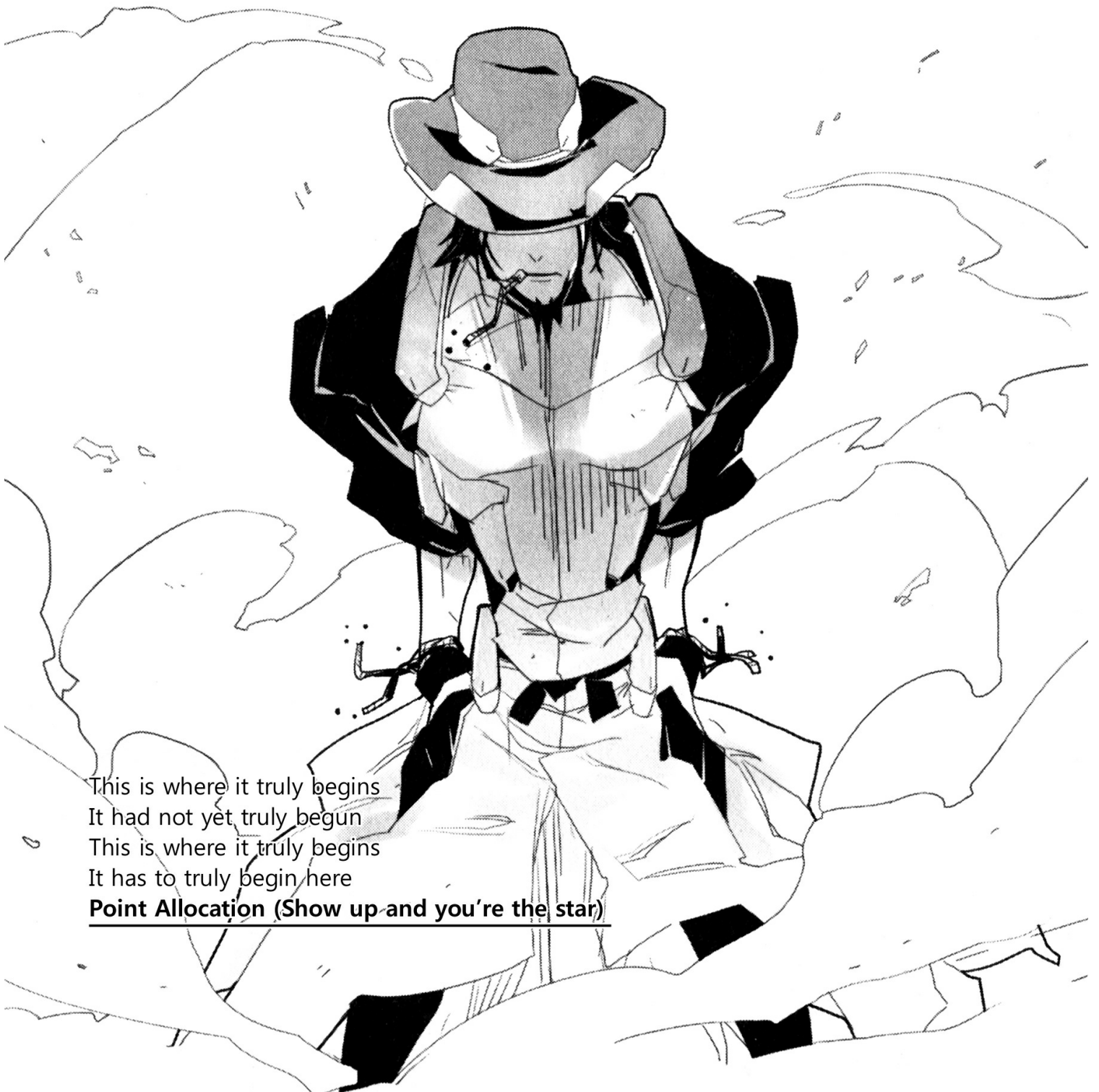
“Unno and I haven’t been here since IZUMO. Today, well, we’re here for a bit of revenge. For our Isa.”

Horizon performed a quick-draw with Maska Orge.

Chapter 16: Higher One on the Stage

CHAPTER 16

"Higher One on the Stage"



This is where it truly begins
It had not yet truly begun
This is where it truly begins
It has to truly begin here

Point Allocation (Show up and you're the star)

This is where it truly begins

It had not yet truly begun

This is where it truly begins

It has to truly begin here

Point Allocation (Show up and you're the star)

Maska Orge was fired in a surprise attack.

As screams of surprise and shouts of confusion rose from the top of the Ariake, Muneshige viewed the enemy's actions. A question rose to his lips on reflex.

"Did it hit!?"

"Master Muneshige, why don't you sound very hopeful?"

"Gin, the Logismo Oplo...are not easy to hit with."

Gold Mar: "Is that a new universal interpretation?"

Vice President: "If only I was that mentally tough..."

Righteousness: "You have some guts saying that..."

He did not entirely understand, but it seemed he had risen to the top of Class 3-Plum's mental caste. Amore.

But he was more interested in the result of firing the Logismo Oplo.

"Gin, what are Maska Orge's effects again?"

"Judge. It does not hit your allies and it hits your enemies."

That was wonderfully simple, so Muneshige asked a further question to hear Gin's thoughts on the matter.

"Gin, what do you think about the scene before us here?"

"Judge." Gin nodded. "They have collapsed."

"...Is that so?"

It actually feels kind of sad when it does hit, thought Muneshige.

Is this what it is like to have deep love for a problem child? But...

“Master Muneshige,” said Gin. “That is...one of the dolls we saw the other day!”

As Gin’s shout raced out, the first to catch on was Tenzou.

...Is this...?

Naruze noticed a moment later, thanks to her own experience.

And from behind her...

“This is one that Isa left behind. It was going to be ejected because there was no way to maintain it, but it can be of some use like this.”

She heard Kakei’s voice.

“Go ahead.”

Then she heard a mechanical voice followed by something other than one of Kakei’s bullets.

“Kh...!”

Explosions erupted at close range.

Explosive flames burst in the night.

After some cannon blasts from the sky, flames and smoke rose from the floating floor.

But something happened to the explosive fire launched toward Musashi’s main force.

“Into the sky...!”

The flames and smoke flew through the air like they had been hit up by a racket.

The roasting and bursting noises illuminated the night sky like a bonfire.

All of the explosions had been knocked back up. And it had been done by...

“Narumi.”

Urquiaga spoke to Date Narumi. She wore a dark green track suit over her prosthetic limbs and she held a mandible sword in each hand. As she viewed Mochizuki in front of her, the objects that had sent the enemy explosions skyward fell back down.

They were several dozen mandible swords.

Narumi had spatially ejected them and instantly attacked with them.

They vanished before they could hit the Ariake’s upper surface.

“I appreciate that you’ve come to me. That means I can take you on even after leaving Date.”

“Narumi,” said Urquiaga. “You could draw those swords without Unturning Centipede?”

“...Come to think of it, I don’t think I ever introduced myself.”

“...Why do you always answer me with such sarcasm? That is no way to treat a holy man, you know? Didn’t you know defying a holy man is a good way of ending up in hell?”

“If that happens, the holy man will come save me.”

“The trouble you put me through,” said Urquiaga before looking forward.

The automaton named Mochizuki was there. The half-dragon then faced Narumi.

“Need any help?”

“That is some trouble I will not put you through.”

“Is that so?” Urquiaga sighed and looked at Narumi in her track suit. “I am currently playing an elder sister porn game from the gym clothes genre.”

“That’s quite the complimentary excuse there.”

“No,” he replied. “That genre had never quite clicked with me. But...”

He patted her shoulder from behind.

“I just realized it can be pretty nice from time to time.”

“Unturning Centipede is being repaired after I burned out the joints in the Seiryu battle, so I’ll be dressed like this or in my uniform for the time being.”

“Then I need to purchase something from the school uniform genre.”

Narumi sighed and leaned forward.

“It would seem I need to buy some more clothes.”

With that, she raced forward.

Explosions signaled the beginning of the battle and clashing swords signaled the continuation.

Of the Musashi group surrounding the crossdresser, Mitotsudaira, Gin, and Muneshige took the defensive role.

“Over here!”

They all hurried toward Naomasa’s sniper god of war unit. They escaped behind the armor panel shields held by the gods of war and below the defense barriers prepared for the sniping.

But a few of them had chosen to remain in the center and fight.

One of those was Futayo.

...Explosion spells are quite troublesome!

She took a combat stance as several explosive flames rose from the Ariake’s upper surface like walls.

And a moment later...

“...!”

She sensed a sudden presence and swung her head half its width to the right. The deer horn sensor she wore in her hair swayed, informing her something was approaching.

And she sensed something where her left ear had been a moment before.

...Wind!?

She sensed the pressure and heard the blowing of wind. It suddenly appeared

along a straight line and passed by.

It did not fly past her. An unexpected noise had split the air.

“This is...!” shouted Futayo. “A ghost!”

“It’s a shot from a ninja technique, you idiot!”

A tall and slender figure stood beyond the flames to her right. They were 7 meters away and facing her.

One of the Sanada Ten Braves, she realized.

...He had a hard-to-write family name, didn’t he?

I think he had a number in his name, but I would feel bad if I got it wrong.

Then he spoke to her.

“I’ll take you on, Honda Futayo. I think we’ll be a good match.”

“Is that so?” Futayo nodded. “In other words, you think we would be a good match for having sex.”

“Hold it, Azuma. Where do you think you’re going?”

“Eh? Oh, u-um, just to get more tea. Ha ha...ha ha ha.”

“Papa just spat out all his tea.”

The entire battlefield ground to a halt.

Other than the automatically controlled ones, even the shellfire from overhead stopped. All focus was on Kakei who was frozen in place and sweating profusely and Futayo who stood in front of him.

“I am still inexperienced, but doing it with someone skilled will allow us to work together, give it our all, and have a more fulfilling experience.”

“...That would need to be censored.”

“Yes, there would be some blood. But...” Futayo looked satisfied. “Feeling yourself reach greater heights like that is a wonderful thing. Personally, I see it

as a kind of sport that lets you work up a sweat.”

“Fulfilling, you say?”

“Indeed. Lately, I have been kept very busy having sex with Kimi-dono. Isn’t that right, Kimi-dono?”

“Kimi! Kimi! This is where both Naruze and Masazumi failed spectacularly, but let’s try to use this to negate your usual behavior! Okay!? Okay!?”

“Heh heh. Asama, you’ve been having sex with me too, haven’t you!? Along with my foolish brother, Horizon, and Mitotsudaira! You often come to our place to have sex, don’t you!? And when my foolish brother gives you what you came for, you say, ‘N-no, it’s so hot. It’s so hot, Toori-kun.’ or ‘Um, I want some bigger meat than this.’ ”

“Waaaaiiiit!! How could you say that on an international broadcast!? How could you!?”

Asama grabbed the collar of Kimi’s track suit and shook her, but the idiot sister did not care. Mitotsudaira was trapped in a state of equal parts blushing and dumbstruck, but Kimi spoke to Futayo.

“Futayo, we had sex in front of everyone during the special student general assembly, didn’t we?”

“Judge.” The samurai girl lightly raised Tonbo Spare. “I was reborn by that sex. I may have that to thank for what happened at the end of Novgorod the other day. Fukushima Masanori-dono and I repeatedly swapped positions and traded spears as we had some very fulfilling sex.”

Kiyo-Massive: “...Fukushima-sama, what were you doing back there?”

Llaf: “I...honestly do not remember that happening... Perhaps I hit my head and forgot all about it when I was slammed into the wall at the end...”

Kakei heard Unno and Mochizuki’s voices far behind him.

They were keeping their distance and speaking with a ninja technique.

“Kakei may not look it, but he’s quite lewd.”

“Is he a beast?”

“I didn’t say this!” he shouted back at them. “And I don’t understand it any more than you do!”

But as he frowned below his hat, he asked a question.

“Just out of curiosity...what do you intend to do with me?”

Musashi’s Vice Chancellor answered him with a deep nod. And...

“Bind...Tonbo Spare.”

Futayo sensed that she had cut the smoke and air before her eyes as well as the figure beyond them.

She did not see it with her eyes. The hit was confirmed by something more like tactile feedback or a sensation that should not have been there.

But she kept moving. She turned to face behind her.

...He circled around...!

There was a skinny person there.

It was the enemy.

The ninja had already made his way behind her.

There was no point in asking when. The enemy was a ninja. Attacking from beyond their enemy’s senses was their specialty.

...Of course, that is only against someone who is too dangerous to face head-on.

Did that mean she was somewhat dangerous to them? In that case...

...I need to be even more dangerous!

Kakei arrived behind Musashi’s Vice Chancellor.

...She has speed, but...

Her bodily control at high speeds was still poor. Or so he thought.

“...Huh!?”

Musashi's Vice Chancellor had spun around in front of him.

The movement looked slow, but it was anything but. Not even he was sure how to perceive it, but this movement was nothing like how she had moved back at IZUMO.

...C'mon, now.

All he knew was that she had acceleration spells shining from all across her body.

None of them shattered and she was definitely guiding them.

The movements looked so slow he could reach out and grab her.

But they were precise.

Takei watched his opponent. His ninja technique was fired like a gun. That meant to draw a line between him and his enemy. And so...

...I can understand her movements!

He watched and he reached his conclusion.

“———!!”

“Takei...!”

Unno saw Takei quickly slide-step to the right to shift his position from Musashi's Vice Chancellor.

He did not move away. That was his pride as a ninja. But...

...What is that?

Unno saw something at the end of Takei's evasion.

It was a dance.

Musashi's Vice Chancellor was dancing.

As someone who worshiped an entertainer god, Unno found her footwork and movements sloppy and amateurish.

But the girl was definitely pursuing Kakei.

She was precise.

When she saw the girl's line of movement, Unno realized these were the movements of a beginner dancer on the cusp of reaching the intermediate level.

This was the joy of realizing what it meant to express something through dance. Musashi's Vice Chancellor demonstrated that joy of understanding in the way she bent her body and the way she moved her hands, legs, elbows, knees, and hips.

It was sloppy.

But that was why its essence showed through.

This was the essence of combat.

It was a dance of nothing more than defeating the enemy and keeping yourself alive.

"Kakei! Don't underestimate her!"

Of course, he would not do that.

That was exactly why he had shifted his position.

Kakei had an innate sense for shooting. That was why he was in charge of guiding Nezu who also used a firing technique. From his perspective, Musashi's Vice Chancellor's movements must have looked like she was going to "shoot him".

And so he had shifted his position.

And because he had dodged his opponent's first shot...

...Now he attacks!

Kakei took a combat stance.

He stuck his hands back in his pants pockets.

“...Sorry.”

With that word, a gunshot rang out.

Mitotsudaira saw Futayo sent flying.

It looked like she had been shot. And behind her...

“...!”

Horizon raised her eyebrows and started forward from the group.

Mitotsudaira was briefly surprised by that reaction.

...Oh?

Horizon had the emotion of anger.

That had been a reflexive emotion upon realizing Futayo had been taken out. It was an impulse that moved her body before she could translate her thoughts into words. Horizon had that now.

That’s wonderful, thought Mitotsudaira.

After all...

...Horizon does not lament, cry, and feel sad when one of us is taken out.

She would also have the emotion of sorrow.

Beyond that was her greed for being with the others. When viewed as a desire, it was a triflingly small and thus difficult to obtain luxury. And when that desire was broken, Horizon grew angry.

After her anger, Horizon would probably feel sorrow.

So Mitotsudaira spoke.

“Horizon, it will be okay.”

She gestured with her chin for Horizon to look forward.

Futayo was spinning her body even as she flew backwards.

“The Soaring Wings on her body have not shattered. Futayo is still fighting.”

Futayo had taken immediate action against Kakei's attack.

She had first defended by raising Tonbo Spare's blade right next to her right ear.

But nothing came there.

Something did arrive in the 2 or 3 centimeter gap between the blade and her ear.

"...!"

It was not a noise. It was a stillness faster than sound, like an aftershock in the air.

She sensed danger, so she twisted her head and then her entire body.

She leaped using her upper-body weight, starting with her head.

She ended up leaning backwards, but it was not enough. The still aftershock spread to cover her cheek as well, so...

"The extension device...!"

She launched Tonbo Spare's bottom end toward the ground to accelerate herself.

She more powerfully spun backwards and made a compact midair backflip.

As soon as she flipped onto her back in midair, something passed by in front of her chin.

It was a bullet. Her night vision was not perfectly clear, but she saw the bullet as it briefly reflected the light of the shellfire.

In that case, thought Futayo. His ninja technique had to be...

...I have no idea!

How had he sent a bullet into the space between Tonbo Spare's raised blade and her face?

Isn't that a little too convenient?

If he had something that convenient, she would really like to know how to do it. That kind of ninja technique would really make fighting easier.

So she thought: *Could he teach me that technique?*

...Do I need to prostrate?

She was performing a midair backflip, so it would be possible to land in a prostration.

If she did so, would it surprise him?

But was there any point in surprising him?

“Mh.”

Just as Futayo tried to figure out what to do, she sensed the enemy moving. The second shot was coming.

Wait, she thought. *You still haven't taught me that ninja technique.*

So she raised her voice.

“No fair...!!”

Kakei was initially confused by Futayo's words.

...Eh? No fair?

No, wait, he thought. *Isn't that how ninja techniques are supposed to work?* After all, a ninja was someone forced to fight while outnumbered and it was their job to steal information from enemy territory and get back alive.

When you were an individual fighting multiple samurai, how could you hope to play fair?

But once he thought about it, he realized he only had one opponent here.

Logically, this might indeed be unfair. After all, ninja techniques were meant for when one was outnumbered, but he was using them against an individual.

But, reconsidered Kakei while making an excuse to himself.

You're a Vice Chancellor, ain'tcha?

And I'm Unneeded and at the same level as a Special Duty Officer... No, a little higher than that. Just a little, little bit higher! That's what I am. So if I'm up against a Vice Chancellor...

“It isn’t unfair at all.”

He aimed his second shot.

He aimed for her lower stomach as she made her backflip and prepared to land. He was reluctant to target a woman’s stomach, but a bullet wound to the stomach could pierce the internal organs and the bleeding was hard to stop. He concluded that dying from blood loss would be cleaner and feel better than having her head smashed apart.

“...!”

And he fired.

“Futayo!”

Mitotsudaira saw Futayo move.

For some reason, she had been trying to decide whether or not to fold her legs underneath her in midair. And then Kakei prepared to fire at her lower stomach.

Mitotsudaira had no idea how, but his attacks occurred at point-blank range.

With Futayo’s reaction speed and with Soaring Wings still active, she could dodge it, but...

...Her landing pose is a mess!

Like this, trying to dodge after landing would cause too great a time lag. And any lag here would be deadly.

Mitotsudaira thought about intervening, but Kakei was poorly positioned for that. He was somewhat hidden from her by Futayo.

Perhaps that was his ninja sense at work.

In that case, she thought. I’ll knock Futayo out of the way with my silver chains the instant she lands.

But...

“Eh?”

Mitotsudaira saw something happen.

Futayo looked down with an “Oh?” on her face.

Of course, the only thing below her was the Ariake’s roof. That was obvious.

But Futayo’s expression made it look like she could not figure out why that surface was there.

...Don’t tell me she got distracted!

Kakei’s gunshot rang out.

Futayo landed at the same moment, but it was not a landing.

As she fell with her knees and hands first, light exploded between her and the Ariake’s upper surface.

...That was...!

Soaring Wings.

The acceleration spell lost control as she failed to connect her landing into her next action. And as a result...

“ ... ”

Futayo was blasted high into the sky, effectively jumping over the bullet fired downward.

Inside the Ariake and on the Musashi, Heidi was inside the basement of the Marube-ya Musashino Shop on the Musashi’s surface.

This was a sturdily-built block that would likely survive even if the Musashi fell apart. It was used to store deeds and seals, and for Heidi...

...It’s a safe place for work even during battle~

Of course, she had not told the others about this place. Only Asama who managed the Musashi’s interior would know about it, but the modifications had been made confidentially and Asama would only think it was a basement.

Yes, they shouldn’t know about it. Probably. Surely. I hope they haven’t found out...

At any rate, it was nice having somewhere for work during battle. Shirojiro was up above driving hard bargains on the expendable goods needed during battle. Heidi was supporting him from here, but...

“Heidi! Did you see the footage from up top!?”

“Eh!? Shiro-kun! Did someone die!? There aren’t any of them we won’t get insurance money for, are there!?”

“No, it isn’t that! Look at this!”

She saw recorded footage sent with a 5 second delay.

It showed Futayo being launched into the air. She seemed to have messed up her landing, but some kind of force had launched her back up and she managed to correct her position. And...

“That’s one of the Top 16 Merchant Prostrations! The Launch Prostration!!”

Kakei looked up in the air.

A prostration flew through the night sky.

...What the hell is this!?

I have no idea what’s going on, he honestly admitted. I came here to fight, but I feel like it’s just been one weird thing after another.

Oh, right. Before leaving, Anayama said Musashi is a dangerous place, but it looks like he was right.

This is so strange.

But then a dancer with gaudy hair spoke from the Musashi group.

“She’s tightened up her body’s axis, so she can correct her position even when she’s sent flying. She used to get stuck in a wild spin. ...Heh heh. Heidi and Shirojiro must be freaking out right now.”

Then the dancer looked to Kakei.

She winked and mimicked a handgun with her hand.

“Watch out, or I’ll say ‘bang’ or something!”

Kakei did not think, *What are you talking about?*

Nor did he think, *Ridiculous.*

He did not even think, *That doesn't even mean anything.*

...I've more or less figured it out.

He had boarded this ship once before at IZUMO. He had mostly been a guest then, so even on the inside, he had only thought of it as a "lively place" as if viewing it from the outside. But...

"So that's it."

He made a turning slide to the right.

It was a quick rotation. The force of it swung around the bottom of his summer uniform's shirt.

"That's right."

A spear tip flew into the position his head had just left.

It was Tonbo Spare.

Musashi's Vice Chancellor had landed behind him in her Launch Prostration and then she had attacked.

Kakei dodged the spear tip to the right.

He spun his body, looked back over his shoulder to view the enemy, and indeed saw Musashi's Vice Chancellor.

In that case, the plan must have been for the dancer to distract him long enough for the Vice Chancellor to attack from behind. But...

...That's not it.

It was an adlib.

The dancer's distraction and the Vice Chancellor's attack had seemed coordinated, but they had not been. Most likely, the dancer had either noticed or predicted the Vice Chancellor's attack and decided on her own to distract him.

The end result was the same as coordination, but it was an adlibbed assist.

In other academies, that was done by firing at the enemy, not distracting them with an idiot.

“But you all don’t have weapons.”

The Far East had been disarmed.

As a ninja, he knew very well how people would fight under those conditions.

First, they would lure the enemy onto a battlefield that gave them an advantage, such as a forest with lots of obstacles or their home village.

There they would use decoys and traps to disturb the enemy, prevent them from taking another step forward, and place them in a convenient point to attack them.

Only then would those with means of attacking be sent in, but even that would be done with the others’ assistance.

These people were the same.

For the ninja, fighting in the forest or their home gave them an advantage.

But these people used something else instead:

...Each one of them is like a tree in the forest.

None of them were incompetent.

They placed the incompetent one at the top.

And to keep that incompetent one alive, they created a forest from themselves, disturbed the enemy, and occasionally attacked.

It could look like they were being silly due to the person at the top, but...

...That’s just the kind of forest it is.

The Far East had no weapons and everything had been taken from them. So when they had joined together and started for the battlefield, they had to have had a single thought in mind: *We’ve got no choice.*

Some of them were not used to fighting and some of them were utter amateurs, but they still did everything they could to intervene.

It was all supported by Shinto. They had the power of substitutions and their individual skills.

So there was a lot of waste, but they were fearsome indeed when it fit together properly. When viewed as a fighting style, their unusual actions could take them to great heights.

What is this? thought Kakei.

It was not Sanada's "forest". Nor was it P.A. Oda's "battlefield".

I have no idea.

So he moved. He reminded himself this was enemy territory and that the enemy had made sure they would have the advantage here.

"———"

As he turned around, light arrived from the corner of his left eye.

It was Tonbo Spare. The racing tip gave a twist and reflected the left side of his face. And a moment later...

"Bind! Tonbo Spare...!"

Futayo realized her attack had failed.

She saw Kakei moving. And he was continuing his previous path around her.

He was trying to move behind her.

...Did I miss!?

No, Tonbo Spare's cutting had worked. But...

"Bullets!?"

Bullets had struck the left side of Tonbo Spare's blade.

The tactile feedback reaching the shaft told her it was 5 shots. They had not been fired simultaneously, she felt a slight time lag between them, and each of them had struck at a different angle.

They had hit and shook the blade just before the judgment was made for the cutting power.

As a result, the cutting lock had been disturbed.

“Requires effort,” said Tonbo Spare.

The cutting was produced in a broken form. So...

“Well, I’m not exactly unscathed.”

As Kakei slid his feet around in the right corner of her vision, she saw a cut in his hat, face, and cheek.

But that was all.

And he said more as he moved behind her.

“I said we’re a good match, didn’t I?”

...Indeed you did!

Futayo tried to turn around, but...

“Sorry.”

Another point-blank series of bullets slammed into Tonbo Spare’s tip.

She was delayed getting the tip back in place.

“...Kh!”

Futayo sensed danger from the left side of her back. That was the opposite side from Kakei, but she sensed a bullet there.

...This is...

Futayo immediately dodged and raised her voice.

“I still have no idea!”

Kakei could tell Musashi’s Vice Chancellor had dodged his bullet when he heard it graze her.

...That’s pretty amazing.

But now he was in danger.

After all, this was an away game in enemy territory. The enemy would coordinate through adlibs.

And this was not an official duel. Sanada was making an attack and Musashi was fighting back.

Musashi's Vice Chancellor had just dodged his attack.

There would be a short delay before she attacked him next.

Normally, he would be left alone in that time. But...

"You all are different, aren't you?"

He heard a very familiar noise behind him. It was the sound of several rifles aiming his way. An anti-personnel formation had been put together in response to Sanada's arrival atop the Ariake.

Based on the sound, it was 27 Far Eastern IZUMO-made muzzle-loading matchlock FMG-0071 Kaede-Uchi. 11 of the gunners were amateurs. And the number who properly had him in their line of fire was...

...Well, I'll manage.

As soon as he thought that, he heard the firing spells open behind him.

And...

"This is more like it. A ninja's gotta be outnumbered."

Several gunshots were fired toward his back.

Asama saw the result brought about by the enemy.

She too had a good firing sense. *Well, maybe a little. Not all that much.*

In her opinion, the Musashi firing squad had demonstrated fairly accurate marksmanship. The rifles that Musashi IZUMO supplied for the guard unit had longish barrels, but that helped increase their accuracy and reduced the number of wasted bullets.

To supply divine protections, the Asama Shrine helped control the targeting spells and some of the internal structures, so of the 27 bullets, at least 19 flew toward Kakei's back 30 meters away.

That was certain.

But what happened next was different.

Sparks flew from Kakei's back.

And not just from one spot. The number was exact:

"...19!?"

Kakei was unharmed.

She knew what had happened. He had deflected them with gunshots of his own.

...Is this...?

Asama realized that this ninja could fire more than one bullet at a time.

His back stood in the battlefield as if to say that singlehandedly taking on a multitude was what made him a ninja.

"Heh heh. That, um, Isa girl from the other day was the same. ...For someone calling herself Unneeded, she did quite well."

"...And those people are going to be our enemy."

"I think they already are," pointed out Mitotsudaira.

Just as Asama nodded in agreement...

...Ah.

Kakei's back vanished.

He had moved. Futayo was already changing her stance.

"...En garde!"

She resumed fighting too quickly to follow.

Asama's eyes had trouble seeing the movements of this ground battle. Her left eye, Konoha, gave her additional information, but she could see nothing beyond that. Their movements were fast and tricky, so they were never in the position she expected.

But that meant one thing:

...Futayo is moving at the same level as him!

Futayo had chosen to disturb her own movements.

What she did was simple: swing her body at high speed to make sure her opponent could not target her.

She was adding an unpredictable element to her dodging and feints.

...Meaning...

“Moving at random!”

Kakei answered her shout.

“What idiot explains their technique?”

“I prefer to play fair!”

“...Hah. Then bring it on, honest girl.”

“Of course...!”

She brought it.

Her father had been good at this. He would readily distract her in battle by suddenly looking to the side and shouting “Ah!” or taking two right steps in a row and saying “Oops”.

Kazuno had been good at seeing through those tricks. Whenever he had tried one during practice, Futayo recalled her glaring at him and hitting him as hard as she could with the shaft of her spear.

That was so nostalgic.

And now she had to do that nostalgic thing herself. After all...

...My goal is to inherit the name of Tadakatsu!

So she moved forward using Soaring Wings.

“Ninja...!”

She pursued him.

He tried to circle behind her. No, more accurately...

...He is moving to my combat blind spots!

Beyond her arm's range of rotation. At an angle her spear could not reach. Even if he was not outside her field of vision, he would circle around to a spot where her attacks could not reach him or pursue him.

In that case, she thought. A samurai must strike her enemy.

In that case, she thought again. What must I do to strike an enemy who is staying out of reach?

In that case, she thought a third time.

...I just have to create a location where I can strike everything!!

She accelerated to keep him out of her blind spot.

“Ohhh...!!”

She sensed his presence trying to circle behind her.

“Outside...!”


Not behind her.

He was running in a wide arc to remain outside of her range.

Chapter 17: Three Different People on the Multi Screen

CHAPTER 17

"Three Different People on the Multi Screen"



Can you see this?
To no one in particular.
Can you see this?
Point Allocation. (God)

Can you see this?

To no one in particular

Can you see this?

Point Allocation (God)

Wind, gunfire, and spear-strikes raced across the battlefield.

It took the form of two movements. Futayo and Kakei repeatedly crossed paths and circled after each other in what amounted to a long S-shape.

When Futayo used her speed to circle around, Kakei would make a short turn-slide back around.

When Kakei tried to circle behind her back, Futayo would make a wide outward circle on the inner corner.

Kakei tended to move inward and Futayo pursued him from the outside.

Kakei used all his strength to keep up with Futayo and Futayo used all her strength to keep Kakei from taking up a position on the outside.

Their gunfire and spear-strikes clashed, making sparks and evasion constant companions.

They moved across the battlefield and passed between the falling shellfire, but...

“...!!”

If either one made a single mistake, they would lose everything, but they continued making only the right decisions.

They continued on.

And another battlefield was formed alongside their movements.

That battlefield was created by Unno, Tenzou, and Mary who faced each other and exchanged sword-strikes.

Unno fought by swinging her fan swords as if dancing and she spoke to the two from Musashi.

“Look away and you’ll miss the best part, you two!”

Unno waved color into her hands. And...

“Now, let the audience gather!”

She produced more weapons.

Two more to be exact.

She opened the four fan swords and whirled her hands, shoulders, and raised knee around.

“This is a show you can only see close to our home.”

Tenzou saw Unno activate some sign frames.

...Those belong to the Yamaga Shrine linked to Sanada land!

She opened 3 each behind her and on either side of her, just like an array of mirrors. They reflected her movements, but the 3 behind her did not reflect her back as she danced and waved the fans around.

It instead showed her front side.

But there was no need to confirm what was happening. An enemy was a threat, so...

“Master Tenzou!”

Mary also seemed to sense the threat, so Tenzou moved in close to Unno.

He kept low and he wore Excalibur on his back, so he planned to use its hilt to block an attack from overhead, while...

“I will nip this in the bud...!”

But Tenzou suddenly found himself unable to control his body.

...!?

He thought he was floating.

But not his entire body. It was just his right leg, but it had not been scooped up; it was floating.

And it was not a rapid rise either. It was the dull buoyancy felt as a slight repulsive force after your foot sinks down into the mud.

But Tenzou did not fight the upward force.

“...”

He lifted the floating right leg to flip to the left.

He left his path toward Unno, but that was fine. He had sensed definite danger in this moment. It was a proper sense of weakness telling him he would be in trouble if he did not do something.

He stuck the landing and regrouped with Mary who approached from behind. He immediately leaned to the left and pulled on Mary's hand while circling to Unno's side.

Of course, he also sent Mary some text data on the strange attack he had experienced.

And then he simply moved forward.

But Unno kept her eyes on him. She made a quick back-step to keep some distance between them and she turned her body.

“You have good instincts...!”

That meant the previous floating feeling had come from her ninja technique.

And...

“Master Tenzou, look at that!”

Mary's voice was not directed at him.

It was directed behind Unno.

The array of sign frames still displayed her dancing form with a background behind it, but those things had entirely changed. Her reflected body looked like it was made of black smoke with a flame colored mouth and the background had become dark, stagnated shadows.

Also, the 3 sign frames on the left and 3 on the right had moved.

They had been stacked before, but they now lined up behind her shoulders

and formed a glowing mirror behind her.

The frame of the glowing mirror was made from light that resembled Far Eastern thatch reeds. And beyond it...

“This is the abyss. Ha ha! Do you know what that means? Yes...”

The fan dancer lifted the corners of her mouth in a smile.

“This is Yomi!!”

As soon as Unno said that...

Asama: “Be careful, Tenzou-kun! Mary! That’s an abyss spell!”

Novice: “Oh, I know all about that!”

Tenzou hid Neshinbara’s comments.

...That was a close one.

In Neshinbara’s stead, Asama’s words reached him while Unno’s dance steps kept her at a distance.

Asama: “Sanada Academy’s primary shrine, the Yamaga Shrine, worships Izanami and Kukurihime. That divine spell should come from their legends. ...In other words, the story of Izanagi attempting to retrieve Izanami, his dead wife, from Yomi-no-Kuni and then fleeing from her.”

Scarred: “That’s from the birth of the god legends I borrowed yesterday, isn’t it?”

Asama: “Yes. In the end, Izanami felt sorrow and resentment when her husband fled from her, so she pursued Izanagi from the land of the dead as history’s first literal wife from hell. She really made a mad dash for him. But when you think about it, even if Izanami had taken things too far, it was Izanagi’s fault for judging her by her looks.”

Mal-Ga: “Why is Shinto so inexact about everything?”

That’s a good question, thought Tenzou, but he had a feeling that was just the Far Eastern way. However...

Asama: “Kukurihime was a god involved in allowing Izanagi to escape, so the Yamaga Shrine has spells to open Yomi and to safely seal it away.”

“Receiving advice from the Asama Shrine of sake-drinking and romance?” asked Unno with a smile. “I’m not actually from the Yamaga Shrine. I came from elsewhere and arrived here as an Unneeded. But, well, I must be a good learner because I can summon the abyss. So...”

Unno held her four fans out horizontally.

“Mary-dono!”

Tenzou and Mary charged forward.

Mary was on the left and he was on the right, but they took a nearly head-on path toward Unno.

“...!”

They made their straight line attack.

Gin watched one of the battlefields on the Ariake while she fired anti-air barriers toward the falling shells using Arcabuz Cruz.

Unno Rokurou.

To be honest, Gin did not know her. The Testament said the historical Unno was born in Sanada. He enjoyed kabuki and, when he danced on stage, Sanada Nobushige was impressed with his skill. After that...

...He worked as Lord Nobushige’s body double and is theorized to have died while disturbing the Eastern Army during the Summer Campaign of the Siege of Osaka.

But the current Unno had a different past.

Gin had heard that an original Ten Braves had inherited the names early on to support the Sanada clan and this group had taken over as a second generation as the Unneeded Ten Braves.

It was a special form of name inheritance, but it was far from unheard of.

The name of Tachibana Muneshige had been taken away from her husband, so if someone else was given the name, they too would have a different past.

The second generation would take over for the first generation and begin a

new age. So...

...They are “higher up” than us.

There was no set hierarchy for inherited names, but that was their greatest goal. But...

“Why do they call themselves Unneeded?” asked Muneshige as he kept his hips somewhat low to her right. “I think I was somewhat mistaken about them.”

“Eh?”

“Judge. I thought they called themselves Unneeded because the previous name inheritors were superior and the current ones were inferior, and thus the current ones were not needed. But...”

That was not it.

“They have risen to the challenge splendidly and truly fulfilled the position of the Ten Braves. It took quite a lot to finally stop Miss Isa as she made her way across the Musashi.”

“That’s right,” said the 6th Special Duty Officer on the shoulder of Jizuri Suzaku which was firing a sniper rifle to deter the Shirasagi Castle’s 1st unit. She kept her eyes on the sky as she spoke. “Their Unneeded title is probably a product of their stubbornness. Although I don’t know the details and I wouldn’t want to get into the meaning they see in their presence here. But...”

Her shoulders lowered in a sigh.

“If they want to demonstrate that they’re ‘needed’, I really wish they’d aim that insufferable determination at someone else.”

“That isn’t an option, 6th Special Duty Officer. ...The Sanada Ten Braves become Matsudaira’s enemies at the Siege of Osaka following Sekigahara. And most of them are killed along with their ruler, Sanada Nobushige.”

Their inherited names ensured their deaths. And one of the Ten Braves, Isa Nyuudou, had already left to never return.

...But...

They had discovered something from the divine transmissions at the time, the

situation after the fact, and the Musashi residents who had interacted with her while she was undercover.

...Isa was always smiling and she fulfilled her role to the very end...

Was it wrong for the survivors to judge the completed image that a person left behind?

Was it the pride of the victor to think she had done the very best she could?

But if she had sabotaged the Musashi, fought so fiercely, and destroyed her own body to truly give it her all...

“How much must people consume themselves before they’re satisfied they have proven their worth?” asked Gin.

In the sky, Takigawa was looking to P.A. Oda’s future and attempting to fulfill her history recreation. In front of them, the Ten Braves were fighting to prove that they were “needed”.

And...

...Honda Futayo is attempting to inherit Lord Tadakatsu’s name, Mary Stuart bears the future of England, and Date Narumi has left the Date clan...

“Taking up the defensive position may have been a mistake, Master Muneshige.”

“It is important to view the smoldering of those taking part and to view the determination of those ahead of us, Gin.”

“True enough,” agreed Gin.

Then she saw Mary and the ninja racing toward Unno far out ahead.

“...?”

And she noticed something.

...Arcabuz Cruz’s aim is wavering?

The shift was small but unmistakable.

The defense barrier shells launched by Arcabuz Cruz were no longer catching

the Shirasagi Castle's shellfire on the center of the barriers.

It was only a difference of a few degrees, but for long-range fire that grew to a great difference.

What is this? wondered Gin as she checked her allies' line of fire overhead. But...

...There is no difference in the sniper fire from the 6th Special Duty Officer's unit!?

The gods of war were accurately aiming for the Shirasagi Castle and their shells were right on target.

Why just me? she wondered and a few possibilities came to mind, such as insufficient maintenance or a malfunction. But she could immediately reject those. After all, the waver was found in the Arcabuz Cruzes on both sides. And it was caused by...

"Buoyancy...?"

Both of the floating Arcabuz Cruzes seemed to be affected by an invisible hand.

And then Gin realized what this was.

She realized what was causing this situation and what to call it.

"Mary Stuart and, um, the ninja!? Be careful!"

"That's an awful way to warn him!" said everyone around her, but she ignored them. She continued her warning while opening a sign frame to raise the power of Arcabuz Cruz's spatial anchoring.

"Yomi is arriving over a wide area!"

Tenzou sensed *that* as he approached Unno.

That was a floating sensation. It was the eerie sensation he had felt in his leg before, like he had stepped into mud. But now...

...My entire body!?

He was already caught in its depths.

His body suddenly sank into the water.

Mary saw something envelop Tenzou's body.

Not long after, *that* reached her as well.

A gentle stopping power surrounded her and gave her buoyancy.

...Water!?

She knew Tenzou had felt this on his foot earlier. He had informed her via divine transmission while they ran.

So she had been prepared.

She had a technique that allowed her to breathe underwater. As a spirit-user, it was a simple technique that only required a glance at a water spirit in the water.

But it did not work.

"This is...?"

It was not water.

Her words were deflected like she had foam in her mouth, but this was different.

Sure enough, she did not see a watery surface or watery wavering anywhere around her.

...This isn't even a virtual ocean like the one around the Musashi, is it!?

As soon as she thought that...

"...!"

She could no longer breathe.

There was no oxygen. And yet she could not see anything that might be water around her.

She was drowning.

This was a first for Mary. Never before in her life had she been unable to breathe or had difficulty moving in the water. And now that was her enemy.

Her entire body was trapped by the water. Her legs slowly flailed in empty air and she seemed to trip. Something cold seemed to rub at her scalp and it soon covered her entire body.

It's heavy, she thought. Too heavy to be water.

...Then what is this?

Just as she sank and started to lose consciousness, Mary realized what this spell was. And she called an important person's name to convey her understanding. But...

“———”

The “water” obstructed the sound.

And Mary sank into the “water”.

As she danced, Unno saw the result of her spell.

Two people were sinking into the “water” before her eyes.

But this was not mere “water”.

...It is Yomi.

This spell provided a stagnating abyss to all things.

It had its origin in Izanami, one of the gods worshiped at Sanada's Yamaga Shrine.

“Everything in this spell's range, even bullets and attacks, will be stagnated. They all sink to the bottom of the water and lose all movement. And...”

She saw the two figures slowly sinking to the floor.

They were Musashi's 1st Special Duty Officer and the English princess who acted as his assistant.

“It's too bad for you, English princess. This ‘water’ is not actually water. So sink to stagnation alongside your beloved. And of course, that stagnation will

soon bring all movement to a stop, leading to death.”

It's a frightening spell, thought Unno.

She could only activate it in Sanada or the nearby regions, but in exchange, it was entirely merciless.

After all, once it was activated, everyone in range was driven to motionless death. As long as she could secure the position of the mirror gate behind her, she could even use it for assassinations through walls.

Of course, she had not always used this spell.

...Only since I came here.

She had trained every morning at the Yamaga Shrine, but one day she had felt something grab at her leg.

She had assumed it was a mysterious phenomenon because she was confident in her movements and concluded she had not made a mistake.

But when she had peeked below the old shrine stage, she had found nothing there. And instead...

...A bell rang.

The old main shrine's bell had rung as something pulled at it.

That dry, quiet sound had brought a faint fog. And then she had seen the reflective water gate formed from a giant loop of thatch reed in the center of the shrine grounds.

It had immediately vanished, but when she had told the teachers, they had immediately thrown a party.

“Did you see that, Kakei? Now we can't make excuses by saying we're outsiders.”

She had said that while tossing him a bottle of sake, but he had simply caught it and smiled.

She did know where his ninja technique came from. His was special and came from a god's game.

But he did not know the meaning of that game, so he could not upset the god

that followed him. So...

...He never did register with the local shrine.

But he had drunk the sake, competed with Sasuke in something halfway between sumo and dancing, and laughed with the teachers.

That's right.

“This spell is a Yomi spell, a spell connected to the gate of death, and a spell that causes everything to sink. But...”

But...

“To me, it's a spell of belonging.”

...Are they actually in a lot of trouble here?

Narumi continued producing mandible swords as she viewed the battle around her.

They were effectively divided into 5 groups at the moment

One was the god of war sniper unit and the main force protecting Musashi's Chancellor.

Another was the firing unit and defense unit protecting the central hatch through which those up top could evacuate.

The final 3 were Musashi's Vice Chancellor, the 1st Special Duty Officer and aide, and Narumi herself. All 5 groups could dodge the shellfire from the sky and they had a clear role on the battlefield. There were a lot of other people around, but they were mainly assisting the first 2 groups.

Narumi guessed they would decide to fall back once 2 of the 5 groups had been defeated.

Not when a majority (i.e. 3) of them had been defeated.

Once 3 were defeated, they had lost.

At 2, they could simply fall back.

It's like the difference between serious damage and total destruction, thought

Narumi. But...

...The Vice Chancellor is fighting and the 1st Special Duty Officer's group is in danger.

For a while now, something felt a little off whenever she drew a mandible sword. That would be due to Unno's ninja technique. It felt like someone was gently holding the tip of the mandible sword between their fingers.

This was stagnation.

If this were affecting my entire body, she thought.

"That would be a problem."

She wished she could go support the 1st Special Duty Officer's group, but the enemy in front of her would not allow it.

That enemy was Mochizuki Yukitada.

She was an automaton and she fought by throwing and controlling explosion spells using gravitational control.

Even now, fire erupted with a slight time lag after the spell left her hand.

And she threw more than one. She threw as many as she had fingers on that hand: 5.

...Eh?

Narumi sensed something amid the danger.

She only barely detected it. It was something familiar, but...

...What?

She could not remember. It felt familiar, but it was not something close by.

That hint of familiarity reached her from the thrown fire, and...

"...!"

Narumi caught the thrown explosion on a spatially-ejected mandible sword.

One explosion led to another. The sounds overlapped as they beat the air.

The girl in a dark green track suit ran through the consecutive noises with a bare minimum of 2 mandible-shaped swords.

The explosions were no longer producing a lingering reverberation in the air.

That was because she caught the flying red flames on her swords and broke through them.

Narumi did that to move forward, and...

...I sensed something just now.

There was something familiar in these explosions.

Was it the setup of the powder, or was it something else? She did not know, so...

...I have to focus on the battle.

Narumi continued forward while focusing on defense.

She occasionally sent an attack toward the approaching opponent, but it was always deflected by an explosion.

With the heated blast and firelight in front of her, Narumi held the mandible swords to either side of her face and viewed the enemy through the gap.

The explosive flames were growing stagnant and revealed the enemy's silhouette in the backlight.

Narumi could see her.

The skinny girl wore her black hair back and wore a compact Far Eastern summer uniform with maid armor attached.

The tights coloration that covered her arms and legs showed the obvious indentations of artificial joints. And...

"This isn't good."

Mochizuki was approaching.

She was not running. She removed her leg joint, sent it as far forward as she could, and planted the heel on the floor. A moment later, she stuck her knee forward and pulled her body toward the heel planted on the floor up ahead.

It was the movement of a spider.

Sticking one leg forward and pulling her body toward it was slow going. Her speed had almost dropped in half compared to running by alternatively moving her legs forward.

But Mochizuki had a reason to move like this.

By moving one leg forward and pulling herself toward it in a half-step, her body did not wobble in the slightest and the accuracy of her explosive throwing increased. It also allowed her to immediately move her body back to lessen the shock of the blast.

Like some kind of martial art, she would throw the explosive at her enemy and immediately move back.

Whenever Narumi tried to move close, an explosion was used as a counterattack.

And when she moved away, an explosion would destroy her surroundings.

This was a troublesome opponent.

Also, thought Narumi. They're linking their blind spots.

They would change their position to put their opponents in just the right spot to act as a shield against any attacks from Musashi's gunners or the main force.

That would be hard to do alone, but with 3 of them, they could keep their blind spots overlapped with the others' so they could look after each other.

In their strategy, Unno could move the least, so with her in the center, Kakei moved in a distant circle and Mochizuki moved in a close-in circle.

"How about that?"

Mochizuki approached and threw an explosive.

After a time lag, flames flew toward Narumi from the fingers wearing a black fire-resistant glove.

"This is coal."

The fires began about the size of a fingertip, but they expanded as they approached. So Narumi swept them up and away with her mandible swords.

It had to be upwards.

After all...

...The smoke is in the way...

The remnants of the explosions falling to the Ariake were producing smoke that blocked her vision.

But there was further trouble.

Her mandible swords had their path altered by the odd “water” that covered a wide range thanks to Unno’s ninja technique.

Of course, she never would have reached Vice Chancellor if interference at this level would screw her up. And as far as she could tell, Musashi’s Vice Chancellor was running around happy as a clam without even noticing it.

Unturning: “Is it just me or is she a little too focused on the fight for a superior position?”

Uqui: “She just has too much energy. She’ll stop once she’s had enough, so leave her alone.”

That was quite the strategy there.

But this “water” was a problem. It meant nothing for them, but it was dangerous.

Narumi thought, *If we don’t do something soon, they could easily take over the Ariake.*

After all...

...Our unit will be defeated.

She realized that this “water” was not just a change to the terrain.

...It’s a manifestation of a negative chain reaction!

Gunfire rang out.

The Musashi gunners protecting the central hatch had fired once more on Kakei who was running in a large circle while fighting over the superior position with Musashi’s Vice Chancellor.

For Kakei, the volley was fired from behind him.

He had turned his back and made a turn-slide when the gunners pulled the trigger.

27 bullets were launched from the line of rifles.

But there was a difference from before. Last time, Kakei had shot them down from his own back.

But this time, that did not happen.

He did not fire to intercept them.

There was no reason to ask why he had felt no need to return fire.

The very next moment, Kakei remained unscathed even after the moment when the bullets should have reached him.

He was unharmed.

The bullets had all missed.

And yet the gunners had all had him in their sights.

“Why...!?”

“I said it’s Yomi, didn’t I!?”

Unno laughed.

The “water” created by her ninja technique was affecting everything atop the Ariake. Everything nearby was enveloped by the water and then sunk to the bottom, but...

...Anything further away is only given the buoyancy.

The shells and the swords of those with adequate skill would not be thrown off course. Besides, the buoyancy was not enough to obstruct people’s movements at a distance. However...

“It has a great effect on lighter things like bullets.”

The bullets fired at Kakei by Musashi's gunners began to float and veered off course.

They missed Kakei and continued on to the person pursuing him: Musashi's Vice Chancellor.

Of course, she had to have expected stray bullets, but these were truly "stray" bullets that had entirely left everyone's expectations.

The Musashi group could independently work together.

So if they did something they did not mean to, it would affect their partner in working together.

"It'll disturb her movements!"

Just as Musashi's Vice Chancellor attempted to attack Kakei, she was blown away.

Kakei was on the move.

Until now, he had been focusing on evasion. He was up against someone with the monstrous speed needed to dodge shots at nearly point-blank range.

...It was worth waiting...

From the bottom of his heart, he wished he was not up against a Vice Chancellor.

He kept a calm look on his face, but he was going all out.

His ninja technique was a close-range firing spell, but as a firing spell, it had a limit to the firing speed and bullet speed.

And the speedy idiot he was up against was faster than both.

He was very nearly helpless.

And that was what made his footwork so vital. He used his gunfire to deter her while he stuck to evasion. This kind of movement was the foundation of a ninja's abilities, so he had many ways of walking or moving his body to take the advantageous position.

He had never expected he would end up using these.

And he had used them so much that he barely felt like he was fighting anymore.

“...Honestly.”

But this enemy was a monster who lived in this world.

He could guess that she saw the speed as herself and she might even feel like her everyday self was the fake one.

She lived in the speed.

...I can't keep up.

No, I can keep up. I'm a ninja. No ninja can't keep up with a samurai.

And he too had a world he lived in: gunfire.

“Yeah.”

Kakei took a breath, performed a single turn-slide, and fully escaped the enemy firing squad's line of fire.

“Metal bullets will do, won't they?”

Kakei's turn ended with him facing the firing squad. He grabbed his hat, lowered his head, and looked over his right shoulder where Musashi's Vice Chancellor had been sent flying.

“Thanks. ...Unno's ninja technique doesn't affect us.”

Sweat poured down his forehead and face as he fired toward Musashi's Vice Chancellor.

10 shots.

Red light glowed from the fuse in his mouth as he launched those bullets toward her.

...Oh, no...

Narumi realized the battle was tilting in one direction.

Out of the corner of her eye, she definitely saw 10 muzzle flashes through the smoke. And the 1st Special Duty Officer ninja and his aide had been caught as they charged toward Unno.

“...!”

They were completely trapped by her “water”.

The aide and the ninja seemed to trip and sink in midair.

...Are they dead?

No, they were not. It was less like they had drowned, and more like...

“...They’re being preserved.”

As soon as Narumi said that, Mochizuki arrived.

She sent her leg forward, pulled her sideways-turned body toward it, reached out her hand, and tossed some fire Narumi’s way.

The explosive light boomed, the sound flashed, and the flames rose into the sky.

And when Narumi blocked it with her mandible sword, she heard a voice. Musashi’s Vice President spoke from the sign frames opened here and there.

Masazumi sighed on the large lift rising to the top of the Ariake.

Yagyuu Munenori had arrived as her bodyguard.

“Do you need something?”

“Eh?”

She looked back, but he was not there. She heard the shell hits from the ceiling and then his voice.

“Oh, um, excuse me...!”

Oh, realized Masazumi. As her servant, he must have thought she needed something when she sighed.

“Don’t worry about it. When you hang around this group, there’s a lot to feel relief, exasperation, and shock about, so sighs don’t mean much. If I do want something, I’ll say so.”

“Judge. No matter where we are, I can fetch a drink in an average of a minute and two seconds.”

“Ha ha ha. That’s pretty good. Our Crossunite has an average of 33 seconds.”

“...”

“What is it?”

“Musashi generally uses the Thales system, so there is a minimum amount of time required to pour the drink in the cup.”

“And?”

“That minimum is 22 seconds.”

“Hmm,” she said while thinking about it, but she was unsure whether that was amazing or not. *I only have Crossunite to compare it to, after all.*

“Well, you do your best.”

She thought she heard someone falling to their knees.

But, she thought while looking to her sign frame. Asama had sent over a summation of the commitment made between Horizon and the Sanada Ten Braves. Masazumi looked back over that as she thought.

...I don’t know if it comes naturally or not, but Horizon’s decisions are really following our standards now.

Musashi’s standards.

What are those? she wondered as she opened her mouth. She had Tsukinowa open a divine transmission sign frame.

“Judge. ...Musashi Vice President Honda Masazumi has a message for the lords of Kantou and the rest of the Far East.”

She took a breath.

“Are you listening?”

“Currently, Musashi is under attack by and fighting back against P.A. Oda’s Takigawa Ichimasu and Sanada,” said Masazumi. “We require no support in this fight. Takigawa’s unit is pure P.A. Oda. Thus, we promise we will defeat Sanada and Takigawa to reconfirm Musashi’s value in battle for the Oushuu nations and to demonstrate our power to the nations of the world. We expect...”

They expected...

“This will reach Mouri and the European nations.”

In Sviet Rus, Uesugi Kagekatsu listened to those words from his throne in the great stone hall.

“Oh?” said Marfa who sat casually on the carpet next to the throne. She held one knee in her arms and raised the corners of her mouth. “Representative of Musashi, you would give us that justification?”

Musashi’s Vice President turned around on the *sankt okno*. She instructed the anteater on her shoulder to connect her sign frame directly to Marfa. And...

“Hark! Might this ameliorate the misgivings in thine heart! ...Tsukinowa-dono! When I spake of an intent for reverential speech, I was not beseeching thee to activate the ‘sermon’ translation setting! ...Oh, yes, yes. Much better. Okay, listening, Marfa? Ignore that just now.”

“What kind of international talks start like that!?”

“My Mouse is just so adorably unaccustomed to all this.”

Kagekatsu laughed quietly.

“Heh. Showing love for a small animal? You must be quite relaxed, Musashi Vice President...”

But after he said that.

...Oh, did I just praise myself there?

That was not a good thing. And showing an animal too much love was also bad. So...

“You must show some restraint in your love. Pamper them too much and... yes, they will grow ill. And that would be sad, wouldn’t it? Heh heh, hah hah...! It is important to keep an adequate distance...!”

Flat Vassal: “I-I think the Sviet Rus Chancellor is really upset for some reason!”

Righteousness: “Well, you started talks with the strict and Buddhist-loving Sviet Rus by using the sermon translation. He probably took it as an intentional provocation...”

Mal-Ga: “That’s a hell of a thing to end with an ellipsis...”

Me: “Listen up, everyone. Someone like that is actually the best at taking care of a hamster.”

Almost Everyone: “No, no, not a chance!!”

Bell: “Eh? I-I think...he actually...w-would.”

Almost Everyone: “Definitely, definitely, I can totally see it!”

Me: “Dammit! Why do you respond to her differently!?”

It was about time to feed the hamster, so Kagekatsu sent some instructions to the Lifestyle Committee as he spoke.

“In other words, you were demonstrating your ability to work together at Novgorod, but now you are demonstrating your ability to fight on your own?”

“Judge. You can view it that way. We would like to make good use of this opportunity.”

In the *sankt okno*, Musashi’s Vice President could be seen breaking the many divine transmission sign frames that appeared nearby. Marfa smiled bitterly next to his side.

“I see you’re as lively as ever, mankind. Things are a lot more relaxing once you die.”

“Alive or dead, I’d be just as busy, Novgorod Mayoress.”

“True enough,” said Kagekatsu with a solemn nod.

...We have literal piles of things to do with moving to the new Novgorod...!

Novgorod had sunk just the other day, but not having Novgorod would violate the history recreation. That meant they had to make a new Novgorod, but creating a floating city of that size was no easy task. And then there was Marfa: “You’re the one that gave permission to destroy it, Kagekatsu. Take responsibility.”

“Heh. Leave it to me and I will create a never-before-seen city full of depravity and beasts where the people live their days like obedient slaves. Are you sure you want that?”

“That does sound kind of fun.”

That was always her answer.

...How lovely!

If I can make an entire city how I want, I’ll make a park full of flowers, an amusement park, and a zoo!

...Just you wait, everyone! I’ll show you more joyful flowers than ever seen in this frigid land, we can forget all about work and enjoy ourselves, and we can frolic with the small animals while enjoying a full day obeying the clearly marked pathways through the zoo...!

When he had shown Marfa the plans he had drawn up in a single night, she had looked the other way and muttered “A theme park...?”, but her usual expression had eventually returned. And...

“Kagekatsu, if you are to guide the people like slaves, you will need some servants disguised as beasts.”

“Heh. An excellent idea, Marfa. ...They would have to be humanoid with animal heads. Now, Uesugi is Buddhist, so it might fun to have it point to the Six Paths. We can use Musashi’s Mikkyo Mouse for reference.”

“Heh heh. ...And we will periodically need to have everyone perform a group Sabbat dance.”

They had laughed and laughed as they enjoyed planning it all out and he

wanted to tell Musashi's Chancellor all about it sometime, but it would be more fun to show the boy once it was complete.

"Just you wait, Musashi Chancellor...!"

Thanks to them, Sviet Rus had endured P.A. Oda's attack and had entered a period of stability. But Musashi was still fighting.

Kagekatsu temporarily cut the transmission setting and asked a question of those around him.

"Do you think there would be any reason to suggest we support Musashi?"

Saitou raised his hand. He was wrapped in bandages below his summer uniform.

"That would be unnecessary. I doubt Musashi would want it. After all, their next opponent will be P.A. Oda itself. That will be different from Novgorod where they fought alongside us."

He opened a *sankt okno* which displayed a map of Kantou.

"As you probably know, Houjou, Sanada, and Takigawa are all groups in or near Kantou who will oppose Musashi. Sanada's position is essentially wavering between P.A. Oda and Houjou, but both Houjou and Takigawa are currently with P.A. Oda. And of those, Takigawa is a P.A. Oda VIP tasked with observing Houjou and Kantou. Will Musashi be able to drive off Takigawa in this battle? That will tell us and the other nations just how much power Musashi really has."

"Testament," agreed someone. It was Honjou Shigenaga who stood at the bottom of the stone steps. She pushed her new sunglasses up her nose. "But while Takigawa Ichimasu is a problem, they have to deal with Sanada first. Sanada has faithfully caused Sviet Rus some trouble too. Let's see how Musashi handles them first."

"I see." Kagekatsu reactivated the divine transmission and spoke to Musashi's Vice President through the screen. "We hope to see an excellent result, Musashi Vice Chancellor."

"Keep your expectations high."

"Are you sure? It would seem Sanada is causing you some trouble at the

moment.”

“Yes.” She waved her hand dismissively. “Don’t worry about it. ...We’ll deal with it even if this doesn’t work.”

Is she serious? he wondered as Marfa exploded with laughter and kicked her legs around.

He then heard a sound through the *sankt okno*.

It was clearly an explosion. Marfa stopped her legs and her laughter grew more subdued. She brought a hand to her chin and spoke extremely quietly.

“I’m glad to see they’re so full of life. Makes me jealous...!”

Someone on the Ariake breathed the battlefield’s air back into her lungs after listening to the divine transmission.

It was Narumi.

She took a combat stance once more and thought to herself.

...I can’t just say I’m a freeloader and slack off.

Mochizuki threw an explosive right in front of her.

But Narumi did not block it. She simply leaned to the side to dodge the coal that passed by her.

...Yes.

She understood something. No, she had remembered something: the identity of what she had sensed in Mochizuki’s explosions.

“Is that a secret technique? You’re still far from being cornered, aren’t you?”

Narumi held out her mandible sword and let the explosive detonate behind her.

“I’ve more or less seen through your explosions, when they expand, and that odd step of yours. I was hoping to wait until I had a more complete understanding, but one of my landlords is hoping for results sooner than that.”

So...

“When my next attack hits, it will defeat you.”

Chapter 18: Heat Source Student in the Line of Sight

CHAPTER 18

"Heat Source Student in the Line of Sight"



The deadline for making good on your words

Is high

Point Allocation (So what?)

The deadline for making good on your words is nigh

Point Allocation (So what?)

“When your next attack hits, it will defeat me?”

Mochizuki parroted Date Narumi’s words while working her artificial intelligence.

...I see. So she claims to have seen through me.

Her body was a machine. And as a machine, there were limits to the movements of the joints. Even with a non-jointed gravitational control automaton, there was a limit to the range of the gravitational control.

To keep one’s actions within that range, an accurate pattern was necessary.

That meant using efficient movements.

It was true that it was safer to assume the enemy would use efficient movements instead of random ones. The enemy’s best attack method was also the easiest to plan a defense for.

However, she was a ninja.

She was also an automaton, but that was why she devoted herself to being a ninja.

She had expected that an opponent of Date Narumi’s level would be able to read any pattern in her movements.

Thus, she had managed her actions and accumulated experience on this battlefield to ensure her movements did not fall into the same pattern. And yet...

“Am I following a pattern?”

Date Narumi held a single mandible sword forward with her hips slightly lowered, but she did not nod. She simply pulled her right leg back.

Then the former Date Vice Chancellor spoke.

“When my next attack hits, it will defeat you.”

It was the same statement as before.

Immediately, Date Narumi charged toward her.

She's slow, determined Mochizuki.

An automaton's thoughts were far faster than a human's. If a human's thought speed was a 1, then an automaton's was several thousand with a maximum of nearly a million.

Mochizuki's accelerated vision saw Narumi running. She had leaned her body forward.

...That is quite a deep lean.

She almost seemed intent on bringing her chin to the floor. She kept her hips arched high and she was only able to run like that thanks to the strength of her prosthetic legs.

Her hair fluttered behind her and she raised her sword high.

"...!"

The raised sword was going to strike Mochizuki's left leg as she sent it forward.

The attack would sever one leg, but Mochizuki was puzzled.

...Why?

This was Date Narumi's *first time* severing a leg like this. So...

"You would not have seen a supposed pattern for this."

As she wondered why, she pulled her left leg back.

She dodged it.

She fell back while also throwing her explosive.

At the same time, Date Narumi accelerated and stood back up. The thrown explosive coal passed by her head.

Then it exploded. The blast pursued Date Narumi and blew her hair around, but she swept it back behind her by pursuing Mochizuki.

Date Narumi's sword was in her right hand. She once more targeted Mochizuki's left leg. Specifically, the left knee. Mochizuki had yet to fully pull it back, so Date Narumi targeted the raised left knee.

And so Mochizuki quickly pulled her left leg back.

Her high processing speed allowed her to see her opponent's movements. Her thought speed told her when she had to move to remain safe.

So she did so.

As she pulled her left foot back to join her right heel, she also pulled her right foot forward.

And she threw an explosive. Date Narumi ducked to avoid it.

She pursued. And...

"...Like this."

Her arm rotated in an impossible way. No, it was a prosthetic. The mechanical right arm was targeting Mochizuki's torso even as Date Narumi kept her body low.

But Mochizuki could see it all. She calculated when to dodge, so...

...It is no use.

With that thought, Mochizuki fell back and dodged.

Then Date Narumi attacked again. It was faster than before, but it came immediately after the other. So...

"..."

Mochizuki dodged.

The girl with prosthetic limbs pursued.

The automaton girl was pursued.

A mandible sword attack was dodged.

Several explosives were avoided.

Many such moments were repeated, overlapped, and did not fit together.

No matter how much the pursuer bit at her, the pursued pulled back just barely enough.

No matter how much the pursued attacked, the pursuer just barely avoided it.

But someone spoke among those watching it unfold.

“She can’t seem to hit...”

Voices of “yeah” and “judge” followed. But then Urquiaga spoke as he worked as a defender next to Asama who was quickly managing the various spells needed on the battlefield.

“Narumi. If you find your dance partner’s movements are hard to follow, you can just honestly ask to take their hand. And yet...”

He repeated “and yet” with a sigh.

“Why do you always memorize your partner’s movements?”

...Memorize...?

Mochizuki asked that question as she dodged and fell back for nearly the hundredth time.

What was there to memorize here? But...

“Don’t be silly. ...I’m not about to reveal to the enemy what I can do.”

With that, Date Narumi moved forward.

She swung her sword toward Mochizuki, but the automaton saw through the attack. So...

...Dodge.

She read the timing and evaded.

As a result, Date Narumi’s attack did not hit.

I am the one memorizing your movements, she thought.

But at that very moment, Date Narumi spoke.

“I have *memorized* your optimal evasion pattern.”

“— — — —”

Mochizuki briefly lost her automaton decision-making.

Memorizing and reading your opponent’s patterns was usually what the defender did. They read the attacker’s movements to keep themselves safe. That was how it worked. But...

...She read my evasion pattern...?

Mochizuki did not understand.

Reading the evasion pattern would not allow her attacks to hit. It was known as an evasion pattern because it kept those attacks from hitting. That would mean this opponent had spent all this time memorizing the pattern that would continue to keep her attacks from hitting.

Such a waste of time.

And yet...

“Now,” said Mochizuki’s opponent. “It’s time to hit you like I said I would.”

With that, she moved forward.

Mochizuki saw Date Narumi approach.

However, she was not leaning forward like before. She simply walked forward with light steps.

And...

“Now, then.”

Date Narumi threw away her weapon.

She discarded it like she was merely leaving it there. And the mandible-shaped sword clattered to the Ariake’s roof.

Then Date Narumi continued forward. She moved to pass by Mochizuki on the right.

She approached.

Mochizuki was unsure what to do.

Date Narumi was the former Vice Chancellor of Date Academy and a current enemy. And she was walking forward while unarmed.

She had no combat power. Because she had discarded her weapon. Even if this was some sort of trick, Mochizuki's processing speed could immediately detect Date Narumi's weapon being spatially ejected.

So there was no threat in Date Narumi's action.

Mochizuki determined this to be "safe" and then she realized something.

Her opponent really had seen through her.

...She saw through my optimal decision as an automaton!

A harmless opponent was not an enemy. If someone took no hostile action, they were not an enemy. If they were not going to contact her, they were not even an obstacle.

She could do nothing.

But she had made all these decisions in an instant.

An automaton's processing speed could reach as high as a million times that of a human. So Date Narumi had only taken a single step toward her. The girl's movements were horribly slow in that high-speed vision and the automaton had plenty of time to react.

So Mochizuki thought.

What could she do to make this person into an enemy?

No, setting up a conclusion in advance and trying to fit the calculations to that made for a fun puzzle, but it meant straying from reality.

She only had to view reality and guide things to the result there.

...Now, then.

Mochizuki thought.

"I am fighting Date Narumi and the odds are good her actions are some form of strategy."

...So the odds are good Date Narumi is an enemy.

“Date Narumi was attempting to defeat me until just now.”

...So the odds are good Date Narumi is an enemy.

“In our current mission, Musashi is an enemy.”

...So if she is with Musashi, Date Narumi is an enemy.

“Musashi took Isa from us, so they are an enemy of the Unneeded.”

...So if she is with Musashi, Date Narumi is an enemy.

“Kakei and Unno are supporting my attacks.

...So Date Narumi is an enemy.

“Musashi will eventually be our enemy during the Siege of Osaka.”

...So if she is with Musashi, Date Narumi is an enemy.

...I see.

As Mochizuki thought, she saw Date Narumi prepare to take a 2nd step.

She was approaching.

She was also defenseless. That meant she was not a threat and thus Mochizuki took no defensive action.

But, began Mochizuki in her heart. *The past events suggest that Musashi is very likely our enemy.*

However, there was a problem. Was she perhaps giving an arbitrary advantage to the idea that Musashi was an enemy?

So she thought some more.

“Under what conditions would Musashi be our ally?”

...I have determined the bare minimum requirement would be for the Siege of Osaka to have passed.

Then, thought Mochizuki. *As the Siege of Osaka has yet to occur, Musashi must be our enemy.*

Thus...

“— — —”

Mochizuki launched an attack against weaponless Date Narumi.

She fell back and threw a piece of explosive coal at the unarmed girl walking toward her.

Narumi pursued her opponent who fell back.

The coal approached and expanded.

“I see.”

Narumi spoke with a smile just as the explosion erupted.

...It can be a problem how many of us love flashy attacks.

As Kakei watched Mochizuki's movements out of the corner of his eye, he saw something unbelievable straight ahead.

“C'mon now...”

He had just fired 10 bullets toward Musashi's Vice Chancellor at point-blank range. And she had been knocked away.

But even so...

“Did she forcibly defend against them in midair!?”

Musashi's Vice Chancellor flew through the air.

But she had not been hit. No, she technically had been hit, but...

...She blocked them with her spear!?

Futayo had chosen to use her spear first.

As the bullets arrived from so close to her body, she raised her spear and struck as if pushing back against them.

And that push allowed the bullets to hit the spear before her body.

And just as the spear was hit and pushed back toward her...

“...Soaring Wings!”

She opened Soaring Wings on her feet and knees. Then she kicked off the repelled spear before the bullets could reach her.

“...!”

She leaped.

Kimi whistled, but Asama had lost sight of Futayo.

...*Eh?*

Just as Asama thought Futayo had been hit, Kimi’s hand moved in from the side.

“Over here.”

Kimi grabbed Asama’s chin and pointed her head left. Futayo was there.

She had made a leap while bending backwards in the air. But...

“...!!”

Solid sounds rang out.

There was 1, 2, and then 3 such sounds. Each time, Futayo jumped left through the air while continuing to bend backwards. Asama realized what was causing that odd position.

...*She’s kicking the bullets!?*

She used the struck spear as footing and leaped in the direction of the bullet’s flight. And since she was using Soaring Wings...

“The Hassou Tobi...!?”

“She hasn’t built up Soaring Wings enough and she isn’t jumping right. ...This will eventually become something else entirely. But, well, even when that happens,” said Kimi, “I doubt Futayo can correct that unsteady trajectory. Not with her sense of balance.”

But the sound rang out again. Futayo matched the axis from her feet to the pursuing bullets and she ascended horizontally through the air.

She continued bending backwards as the noises counted up to 7.

“The last one won’t hit her when she’s bent that far back.”

Futayo’s hair flew in an arc.

She dodged that final bullet and landed on the Ariake’s top surface. And...

“————”

Something flew into Futayo’s raised hand.

It was the Tonbo Spare she had used for footing.

She grabbed it and stood up.

The previous Soaring Wings remained on her legs.

They had not shattered. And Asama saw Futayo instantly jump toward Kakei on her right.

“Oh, wow... Hey, Horizon, I can see her! I really can! You don’t have to grab my face and turn my head for me!”

Kakei did not look back.

He did not need to know the enemy was approaching.

“Bring it on, impatient girl!!”

He fired. But not from him to his enemy.

...The right side!

He fired from the right of his enemy while she ran. And at point-blank range.

He immediately heard a noise.

It was the solid metallic one of a ricochet. And it came from directly behind him.

“Goddammit...”

He did not look back.

There was no reason to. After all, the sound was more than enough to know what had happened.

“Did you block them with your spear!?”

The wind blew in on the left.

It was Musashi’s Vice Chancellor.

She had leaped to the left and caught them on her spear while airborne.

The wind she created was not targeting him. So...

“I don’t mind.”

He let the sweat drip down from between his hat and skin and he placed a new length of fuse in his mouth.

“You know how my attack works, don’t you? But let’s see this through to the end.”

With that, he came to a stop. And...

“Time for a shootout.”

Chapter 19: Wall Builder in a Clogged Place

CHAPTER 19

"Wall Builder in a Clogged Place"



What is surprising when it catches you
And also surprising when you escape it?
Point Allocation (Unexpectedness)

What is surprising when it catches you

And also surprising when you escape it?

Point Allocation (Unexpectedness)

Unno knew she held a fleeting control of the battlefield.

She was being fired on, but the bullets could not reach her. Even the shellfire from the sky was weaker near her.

There was no need to ask why.

The power of Yomi was in effect.

It had originally been a local divine spell of the Yamaga Shrine. The spell produced the “water” in which the dead sank to be preserved, and it was used to celebrate their ancestors.

Long ago, the local leader had likely used it to preserve the bodies of their ancestors so that he could act on their god’s behalf and so his power could be passed down to his descendants.

She had altered it by activating it through her dance.

She had created a *spreading preservation*. It created stagnation and sinking. Anyone nearby who sank into this “water” would slowly enter a state similar to hibernation and their body would ultimately shut down, leading to death.

But the most important aspect was not the deadly close range effect.

It was the long range effect that caused all movements to waver.

That prevented the firing squad from attacking her.

They could fire, but their bullets would not fly right.

And it had to be causing some slight trouble for the enemy fighters.

Of course, Kakei was using his movements to prevent the enemy from targeting her and Mochizuki was doing the same using her explosions and smoke.

Kakei was not registered with Yamaga, so the process for excluding him from

Yamaga's effects was a bit troublesome. However, Unno had had her restrictions removed this year, so that was less of a burden now.

She only had to give him a temporary registration, and...

"I guess I need to focus on my own work."

As she danced, Unno raised her fan swords.

12 meters in front of her, Musashi's 1st Special Duty Officer and his aide were collapsed and sinking.

They had come to a stop. They appeared to be dead, but at this rate, they would remain alive.

"Killing them or doing something with their bodies would probably help with Sanada's reputation."

Asama saw the idiot walk up to her and point toward Tenzou.

What is this about? she wondered as the crossdresser frowned and spoke.

"Hey, hey, Asama. Aren't Tenzou and Mary in trouble?"

"I think Tenzou-kun did something to help Mary. And Tenzou-kun...should be fine."

"Really?" he asked.

...I guess he can't help but be worried about what worries him.

This really isn't the time, she thought, but since he had shown how he felt and had come to her for help, she decided to show him the answer.

"Here. Look."

She showed him a sign frame.

It contained just a few words:

10ZO: "I am okay."

The crossdresser looked at that, looked at Asama, and then looked at Horizon, Mito, his sister, and the others.

“If he’s trying to keep it short, did he really need to spell out ‘OK’ as ‘okay’?.”

“N-now, now. Tenzou-kun is doing his best to get through this. And I’m doing what I can to analyze that spell, so we’ll manage.”

“Um, but, Asama-chi.”

Naito pointed at the scene and Naruze continued for her.

“That dancer ninja is planning to throw her fan sword at Tenzou while he can’t move.”

“Oh, then maybe it’s not okay at all.”

“Asama-sama, I admire how quickly you gave up,” commented Horizon.

“W-well, it’s just that fan swords are outside of my area of expertise!”

“Can’t be helped then,” said the crossdresser. “We’ll just have to cheer him on from here!”

“If we do that, she’ll figure out Tenzou-kun can move! Let’s trust in Tenzou-kun!”

“Uqui, do you trust Tenzou?”

“...Sorry, I was watching Narumi.”

“Wow,” said the girls and Asama heard Naomasa sigh.

“If only Tenzou had come to the engine division. We would’ve squeezed a lot of work out of him...”

“That’s not very nice, 6th Special Duty Officer,” pointed out Adele.

“W-wait.” Mitotsudaira spread her arms to scold the others. “Mary is there! So it’ll be okay.”

They all exchanged a glance and smiled.

“Oh, yeah!! Mary’s there!”

While still collapsed and holding his breath, Tenzou heard his awful classmates’ distant conversation through the vibrations in the floor.

...Those people...

But they had settled on complimenting Mary, so he considered giving them a pass this time.

As he had informed Asama, he was alive and not stagnated.

He had detected Unno's spell and used a countermeasure. An incredibly simple one.

...I held my breath and kept any of it from escaping!

He had a dark sign frame displayed on the bottom of his hat's brim. It displayed Asama's instructions for the standard countermeasure for mysterious phenomena and spells.

Asama: "Please hold your breath to prevent the 'ki' from getting inside you. This is not evil energy, but holding your breath with the intention to keep it out will prevent the ether 'ki' from entering your body and will prevent the enemy's spell's effects from activating within you. What I'm saying is..."

From there, she began with a long explanation which caused the initial important bit to scroll off the screen, so he was glad he had checked it right away. *Towards the end, she was saying something about the Shinto legend of Yamato Takeru crossdressing, so Asama-dono must be quite the Shinto nerd.*

But the enemy's spell was still an unknown.

Based on the sensation that had grabbed his foot, he knew Unno's spell had something to do with water. So when he had charged in, he had intended to overcome it with an underwater movement ninja technique.

Mary could contact water spirits, so he had figured she would be fine even if it was virtual water. However...

...I never thought she would sink.

His heart did not protest that it was impossible. It was an undeniable fact that Mary was drowning. He could only blame it on his mistaken decision. So he had sent her everything he had and "dived down" using pure martial arts.

He had no way of knowing if Mary was conscious.

He was waiting for a divine transmission from Asama, but it would be best not to assume Mary could fight.

After all, this “water” was dangerous.

After sinking into it, he found it to be cold but pleasant.

The chill seemed to cleanse and pass through his body as it soaked him from top to bottom.

But he soon realized that this chill was dangerous.

The chill focused on the important parts of his body: the ankles, the wrists, the armpits, the waist, and the neck. He also found himself growing horribly tired.

The chill appeared where his heartbeat could be best heard. His pulse was there. So...

...This “water” detects movements and sounds and then brings stagnation.

Holding his breath and hiding his pulse were standard ninja stealth techniques.

Asama: “Oh, the way you ‘stop moving’ for your stealth techniques is derived from Shinto methods of stopping your ‘ki’. By not moving and keeping the location’s ether from entering your body, you might as well not exist there. A single reverse search will find you right away if you do that, but those spells didn’t exist in the past, so assassins could apparently get all the critical hits they wanted.”

You sure do enjoy explaining things! he thought, but the situation was getting pretty bad.

Unno began swinging her fan swords more strongly as she danced.

She was targeting him. And she likely intended to throw a fan sword to slash at him from a distance.

This was not good.

His body was quite heavy while sunk to the bottom of the stagnation. It was more like being at the bottom of a mud pit instead of water.

Of course, he could move from here.

But he would only manage a few steps from his initial velocity. Any more and the “water” resistance would sap him of all speed.

If that happened, it was all over. So...

Novice: “You have to get close to the enemy! This is a standard scene in ninja stories: the battle between the ninja playing dead until the enemy gets close and the enemy trying to figure out if the ninja is dead!”

Smoking Girl: “Which one generally wins?”

...Did you have to ask that so bluntly, Naomasa-dono!?

Me: “C’mon, don’t be silly. Tenzou’s not like a manga MC. ...If anything, he’s a background character, so there’s no way he can win if we look at this in manga terms.”

If I get out of this alive, I am scolding him so hard.

But in cases like this...

Uqui: “The normal course of action would be to attack Mary, not Tenzou.”

That was true.

If Unno attacked Mary, she could simultaneously see if he would react to Mary and if Mary could move.

Mal-Ga: “But why not the other way around? Do you not think it would move Mary’s heart if the ninja got stabbed? Actually, that doesn’t seem very realistic. Yeah, I guess that’s just not how it works.”

...Don’t answer your own question like that!

This was not good. The enemy had not even done anything yet, but he was about to make a mental fumble with his tsukkomi skill and say something out loud.

But then Unno took action. As she danced, she swung her entire body, and...

“————”

She threw the fan sword.

And just before she did, a cannon blast rang out.

It came from the main Musashi group that was otherwise busy saying silly things.

A shell was launched using a spell's repelling acceleration and it noisily tore through the sky.

A voice accompanied the great roar.

"Herrlich...!"

It was Naito.

The Schwarz Hexen used the seated crossdresser's shoulder as a support and fired a roll of coins toward Unno.

The roll of coins trailed the ether acceleration light and targeted Unno's follow-through after throwing the fan sword.

Before Unno could correct her posture, it arrived right in front of her.

"———!"

And it exploded.

Naito saw the coin roll bullet explode and send its 100 guided bullets toward Unno. But...

"They're sinking...!?"

Those bullets had the divine protection of Techno Magie. They would normally weaken and break through an enemy's defense spell or barrier, but these clearly slowed down and sank.

They were obstructed.

...That spell sure is powerful...!

She was briefly reminded of Tres España's Testamenta Arma: Crus Temperantia – Novum. That had divided the power of any ability by the number of times it had been used, but this was like a version of that which only affected a smaller area and was limited to speed.

Naito decided it would be a good idea to research a way to shoot through this kind of spell.

“Ga-chan...!”

“I’m already firing, Margot.”

She looked behind her where, hiding behind the idiot, Naruze was supporting a *schale besen* on his head.

But that Weiss Hexen partner’s eyes were not directed Naito’s way.

She was looking into the sky.

In the night sky, the enemy’s shellfire was being fired by the Shirasagi Castle’s 1st unit that flew in a wide circle overhead. But something flew up toward it.

It was Naruze’s guided bullets.

Naito’s shots had been a distraction to hide these 4 shots behind her.

...Nai-chan’s really are most powerful when fired horizontally.

But in that case, they would sink and might not reach the enemy.

However, the shots were a sure thing if they dropped from directly above the enemy’s head.

So while Unno was distracted by Naito’s shots...

“If you’re all about sinking, how about some guided bullets from directly overhead, Far Eastern shaman?”

The 4 high-speed coin bullets soared high into the heavens but made a sharp curve to drop straight down.

The 4 coins dropped down toward Unno and her thrown fan sword.

They were right on target.

Tenzou watched Naruze’s bullets from below his hat’s brim.

...Will this work!?

After flying high, 2 of the coins dropped toward Unno, 1 dropped toward the

thrown fan sword, and 1 was clearly dropping between his legs. It was going to just barely miss his crotch.

Was she telling him not to move? Or was she telling him *to* move?

However, the enemy was targeting Mary. If Naruze's bullet did not knock down the fan sword, he would have to make a choice: Save Mary, or not save Mary.

If he saved Mary, Unno would realize he could move.

...And I would sink and lose my speed.

That's fine with me, he thought. *But,* he also thought. *Because...*

...Mary-dono might be delighted by that, but she would not want it!

As soon as he realized that, Tenzou heard something.

He heard the 4 high-speed guided bullets falling from the sky.

"———"

But he did not hear them hit.

He only heard 4 dull and muffled sounds.

Naruze's guided bullets had been caught in the "water" spread out overhead.

...It doesn't take the fall speed into account!?

Naruze frowned at the result.

"What is that? I thought it was like water or mud, but is it a space of pure 'stagnation'!?"

The sinking and the brief floating did not come from anything based on water.

...She's transforming stagnation into something like water, isn't she!?

This is bad, thought Naruze as she saw scattering light.

Above and in front of the stagnation dance, Naruze and Margot's coin bullets were slowly falling while reflecting the colors of the surrounding shellfire and explosions.

And Unno stood beyond the coins that fell as gently as scattering leaves.

She shifted from her follow-through to her dance and she looked toward the Technohexen.

She was smiling. And they could read her lips.

“Thanks for the money offering.”

As a dancer, did everyone on the outside count as part of the audience? In that case...

“Mary!”

The thrown fan sword reached Mary.

A solid sound rang out and sparks flew.

And Tenzou definitely heard two steel sounds rolling along the solid floor.

...Did it work!?

He looked over the best he could without moving his eyes and found Mary was not moving.

That meant nothing had happened to her.

The object that had taken the fan sword on her behalf stopped rolling and produced a quiet metallic sound.

It was Excalibur.

It was the half he had wielded. Holding onto it had paid off.

He had used his breathing to time when the fan sword would arrive and then pressed the pommel against the slanted floor to raise the sword. He had thought using only the edge of the pommel to lift Excalibur via leverage would be difficult, but...

...The stagnation has Excalibur in its grasp, but it doesn't seem to have sealed off the sword's will.

Excalibur could not float like normal, but it had stood up to protect Mary.

This was the result.

He had lost his weapon, but that was fine.

Like this, the enemy would be unable to tell whether Excalibur had acted on its own to protect Mary or if he had had a hand in it.

And this meant Unno would not target Mary again.

Me: “Tenzou? Was that you, Tenzou? Or did the sword move on its own? Which was it? Tenzou isn’t answering. Should I call his number?”

...Don’t do anything so dangerous!

Then someone else’s words reached his sign frame.

Asama: “Wh-what are you saying, Toori-kun? Stop that. It’s dangerous!”

Yes. Yes, yes. It’s dangerous!

Asama: “Besides, it was Tenzou-kun’s love that saved Mary! His love! Excalibur stood up when it sensed his loving desire to protect Mar-...wow, so much passion! I said it myself, but I can feel the passion burning!”

Silver Wolf: “No, um, what are you joking around for, Tomo? You can’t get all heated up over this. That was the 1st Special Duty Officer’s loving resolve to protect Mary even if it put him in dang-...sweet That’s super sweet! I never knew we had anything so sweet in our class!”

The girls really are sensitive to this kind of joke, he thought.

Meanwhile, Unno began to throw something from beyond the falling coins and scattering ether light.

It was a 2nd fan sword.

Based on the movements of her dance, he predicted it was headed straight for him. That was exactly what he wanted. So just as she started to throw it...

...Kh.

I have to go for it, he told himself. He got up, he faced the enemy, and...

“———”

He went for it.

Tenzou got up and faced the enemy.

He entered a high-speed dash from the very first step.

But his body was heavy.

...I'm being dragged down...!?

The power of stagnation pulled down and clung to his body as he tried to move forward. But...

“Kh...!”

He used all his might to pour acceleration into his body.

And just as he somehow managed to reach something like his normal speed...

“Kyah!”

He heard a cry and something white appeared in front of him.

...What!?

Just as he questioned it, he tripped and dove face-first into it.

He had stumbled and failed right on the starting line.

Unno saw it play out just before she threw her fan.

...So the ninja really could move!

She felt it was wrong of her to feel so happy the enemy had survived just because he was a fellow ninja. But for that very reason...

“I won't hold back!”

It did not matter that the enemy had tripped.

She fully pulled back the fan sword in preparation to throw it. But at that very moment, she realized why the ninja had tripped so suddenly.

...The English princess!?

Chapter 20: Converter on the Stagnant Stage

CHAPTER 20

"Converter on the Stagnant Stage"



Strangely enough
My emotions
Are always triggered by you
Point Allocation (Qhhh...)

Strangely enough

My emotions

Are always triggered by you

Point Allocation (Ohhh...)

Tenzou quickly got back up.

...U-umm, what was that!?

He remembered trying to run and getting caught in something. But it had tangled around his body and fallen down with him.

He had reflexively grabbed whatever it was in his arms so it would not be damaged when he fell on top of it, but...

“...”

He looked down. There he saw giant breasts.

They were covered by a white and blue track suit. That had been put on in a hurry, so there probably was no bra below it. But how much devotion did it take to reach this point where they did not lose their shape even when lying down? He also saw blonde hair.

To sum up, it was Mary.

Her hair was a mess and she looked up at him with her eyebrows lowered in a smile. Tears spilled down either side of her face.

“————”

Without warning, she clung to him from below.

...Why!? Yes, more, more!!

The question he should be asking and his honest desire mixed together in his head, but something definitely seemed off.

...Is this a hallucination I'm seeing on the verge of death!?

No. It was not.

After all, these giant breasts were real. The texture of the hair, the body heat, and the scent were all real. They were real boobs. This was booby reality.

But something was not right.

The stagnation was still in effect. When he tried to hug her back, his arms were slow and he found himself entirely at her mercy. But even Mary's hair showed no sign of the stagnation as it moved.

"Master Tenzou?"

He heard her voice by his cheek. And...

"It's my turn to return the favor."

Just as he saw her blue eyes, she lowered the scarf over his mouth and placed her lips on his.

Girls: "Oh."

<Confirmation: Naito-sama has begun recording.>

<Confirmation: Naruze-sama has created a dedicated folder named "Usable Images (13)"> Marube-ya: "Eh!? What!? What's happening!? I can't see from down here!"

Flat Vassal: "Yeah, you're really missing out..."

Marube-ya: "Oh, damn it all to hell!"

Silver Wolf: "Why are you taking this so seriously...?"

Unno slowed her dance without meaning to and found her voice escaping her mouth.

"Oh."

But a lot about this made no sense.

Why was the English princess there?

Why was the English princess not affected by her spell?

Why was the English Princess kissing?

She only knew what was happening before her eyes.

“What the hell are you doing!?”

Unno threw a fan sword with as much strength as she could muster without breaking her dance.

But as the fan sword flew...

“...What!?”

Color instantly blossomed between her and the kissing couple.

The fan sword was broken by the counterattack and the fan spread open and scattered.

As the ninja held the English princess, a fan scattered like an opened umbrella.

And Unno saw the ninja holding something in his right hand while holding the English princess in his left.

...The English princess's Ex. Collbrande!

But hadn't the ninja been at the bottom of the “water” until now?

For some reason, his current movements, and even the movements of his scarf, were no different from when he was in the open air.

He stood up, placed the princess on the floor, and nodded once.

“I'm off then.”

“Get going then.”

Unno felt a tingling shudder from that exchange, but was that a sign she was immature? In the distance, the Musashi firing squad and other normal units were opening sign frames and furiously typing up posts for the divine network, so could she assume Musashi felt the same way she did? But...

“Are you coming?”

The ninja moved toward her in lieu of answering.

He's fast, thought Unno, but she could not stop her dance. Kakei and Mochizuki were fighting to support her. So...

"How about you join the dance...!"

"Hey."

Asama realized the crossdresser was looking her way. She was fairly certain she knew what he wanted to say.

"You want to know why Mary and Tenzou-kun can move, don't you?"

"Yeah. What was that? Does it not work on the English? Or does kissing give you some kind of power?"

"That's kind of close, but I can't really tell you."

Most of the girls seemed to know what she meant because they all nodded and said, "I see."

...That's right.

She would have to get Horizon to explain it to him later, but Kimi would probably work as well. What mattered was...

...Love.

"The Yamaga spell used by that ninja over there is a manifestation of Yomi. Do you know what Yomi is?"

"Yeah," said the crossdresser. "That's where tentacles come from. I've played enough porn games to know that."

"Oh, Mori! Why the sudden sneeze? You okay? It's still pretty cold, so you should probably keep wearing your cold weather clothes. It would be good for the morals around here too!"

As soon as Mori entered the dining hall, he sneezed and spewed slime, but Toshiie readily spoke to him despite the surrounding panic. The cheerful tentacle wiped up the floor with the wooden box of tissues he carried with him.

“Eh? D-don’t worry, Master Toshiie! I-I think someone must be talking about me. That happens sometimes, doesn’t it!?”

“Huh? Who would talk about you?”

“O-oh, c’mon, Mater Sassa. I-I hope it was, um, her... Ahh, now I’m imagining it again! Curse my imagination!”

Mori began slamming himself against the wall like a thick whip, but he soon stopped.

“Kh, i-it’s no good! This only applies the perfect stimulation to the underside and just gets me harder! I-I’m such an inconvenient creature...!”

Fuwa sipped at a teacup and lifted up a spice bottle with her other hand.

“Would rubbing salt on you help?”

“N-no, that would only improve blood flow and make me full-time strong! When I tried it one time, I went all ‘kuwawa’ and couldn’t get myself to settle down, so I had to roll around in the snow outside to cool off! Lady Fuwa, you need to learn more about tentacles so you can have a more intimate understanding of us!”

“I’ll pass on that intimate understanding.”

“Wh-what a mean upperclassman! Just so you know, someone out there is speaking kindly about tentacles right now!”

“So what’s this about the home of tentacles?”

“That’s not what this is about... Well, I was already thinking I should cut out that sort of material when testing games for you. But anyway, Yomi is the realm of the dead, but it originally referred to an underground spring.”

“Like an underground lake? There are a lot of those in Europe.”

Asama nodded at Adele’s comment from Raging Beast.

“Yes, a seemingly bottomless spring located underground. Anyone who dived into it was dragged down by the chill of the water and couldn’t swim back up, and those who died there were preserved just as they were when they died at

the bottom... It's said that concept may have led people to refer to the afterlife as Yomi. And it seems this spell from Sanada's Yamaga Shrine uses that Yomi."

The part of Shinto mythology that placed the most focus on Yomi was the birth of the gods.

...Izanagi went to Yomi to bring back his dead wife Izanami. But...

"Izanami was dead and rotted. He was told not to look back as he returned and, if he did not look back, Izanami's impurities would be cleansed by the purification rules, but he gave into temptation, looked back, saw his wife's transformed appearance, and fled."

"What happened to the wife?"

"Heh heh. You want to know? Well, you see? She chased after him with an army of the dead and-..."

Kimi imagined the scene as she explained it, so she fainted and collapsed in an S-shape on the floor. For some reason, the term "self-sufficiency" came to mind, but that was not entirely inaccurate. Regardless...

"The dead rot away, but while contained in that spring, they appear the same as in life when pulled back up. The ancient people probably thought the cold water was purifying them when they were pulled up from the realm of the dead. But when you compare that to the legend, one property of Yomi becomes apparent."

Asama had a sign frame open by her hands.

It was addressed to Mary. It was different from the one sent to Tenzou and she had not known if Mary would see it, but she had sent it as support all the same. It provided the following explanation: "The living should be unable to visit or return from Yomi. It is a stagnant land from which there is no escape. So why was Izanagi able to visit it and return? That would be..."

That would be...

"Because Yomi is ruled by emotion."

Mary held the sign frame from Asama to her chest.

She opened her mouth and released...

“Ahh.”

A sigh. A heated one of happiness.

...Lady Asama was exactly right.

She had studied up on Shinto since coming to Musashi. To make a hidden contract to match Tenzou, she had gotten him and Asama to teach her about Shinto mythology.

And one of the stories that had interested her was near the end of the birth of the gods: the return from Yomi when Izanagi and Izanami were parted.

...Why?

The world had a lot of legends in which people had once been able to move between the realm of the dead and the realm of the living. There were also a lot of legends in which that path was sealed in a conflict between the gods.

But the Far Eastern legend was a little different.

A husband went to find his wife.

Mary found this strange. And when learning about it the previous night while sitting across a writing desk from Tenzou in their small room, she had asked him a question.

“Had no god travelled between the realms of the living and the dead before that?”

He had not known the answer, so she had asked Asama via divine transmission.

“There was a god who acted as a guard, but the rules generally said you couldn’t return once you went there.”

In that case, the living and the dead lived in worlds governed by different rules.

The path to Yomi was the one-way path of the dead sinking to the bottom. The living could not visit and return.

Then why had Izanagi been able to do so?

Is there some kind of condition? wondered Mary. *Was there some kind of condition for visiting and returning, and Izanagi naturally had whatever it was?* For example...

...Bringing along a spirit that lets you breathe underwater?

As a spirit-user, her thoughts naturally turned in that direction. But Asama had not rejected the idea. According to her...

“In ancient times, the gods and the spirits were often seen as one and the same, so in the legendary age, I think the gods may have naturally carried spirits with them in addition to using spells.”

In that case, thought Mary. *What kind of spirits live in Yomi?*

She had initially considered water. And when faced with a spell that created a manifestation of Yomi, she had used the same spirit spell that allowed her to breathe underwater, but she had started drowning.

That was not it.

Yomi was a place of stagnation and sinking made of something other than water.

Mary brought a hand to her mouth as she considered the answer.

“Could Yomi be where the spirits of sadness live after they sink down?”

When spirit-user Mary realized it was not “water”, she came to understand something: death.

When she had begun drowning for the first time in her life, it was fear that filled her heart. But it was not just a confused feeling or the fear that her own life would be ended.

...I'll be separated from...Master Tenzou...

They would be separated and they could never meet, talk to, or touch each other again.

The word “sad” came to mind.

And then she realized the “water” that had driven her to this state might be

made of that.

Spirits resided in all things, even emotions. So Mary saw that sensation. And...
“Judge.”

It made sense when she thought about it. Death was always accompanied by sadness and Yomi was where death gathered.

In that case, thought Mary. What can break through that sadness?

And the answer reached her before she even thought about it.

He protected her using Excalibur. Even though he would be targeted next and he had no way of knowing if she was still alive.

He had promised that he would protect her from anything. But separate from that promise, Mary felt something when she saw it for herself.

...Master Tenzou.

She did not want to be parted from him for as long as she lived. She wanted to see him, speak with him, and be with him on a daily basis. She knew what it was that made her feel that way. So...

...This is the answer.

As a spirit-user, Mary summoned that spirit within herself. She used a spirit spell to solidify what was originally only a fleeting existence.

It was what brought sadness and could resist sadness.

She could move.

Had Izanagi been the same inside Yomi? But as Mary moved and tried to give him that spirit, they ran into each other.

“Hee hee.”

It’s just like the first time Master Tenzou showed me his face, she thought, which amplified the spirit.

So she kissed him to send him the spirit born from her feelings.

“Lady Asama. ...I had a thought earlier.”

“What was it?”

“When Izanagi saw his wife’s transformed appearance, he fled. But why was he able to escape then?”

After escaping, Izanagi had sealed the entrance to Yomi with a large stone and then argued with Izanami.

“In the Kojiki, Izanami said she would take 1000 lives a day, so Izanagi said he would produce 1500 lives a day and they parted ways. But...”

But...

“In the Nihon Shoki, they made their respective positions clear and found reconciliation. And when Izanagi heard the words of the goddess who witnessed that, he praised her words and left. It isn’t clear what that goddess said and that remains a sort of mystery, but her name is apparently Kukurihime.”

That was the other god of the Yamaga Shrine.

“Kukuri means to tie together. And that act of tying two things together refers to reconciliation and marriage. Now, Lady Asama, here is my thought: Izanagi was able to move through the stagnation and he fled through the stagnation on the way back. And Izanami pursued him. So...”

She smiled a little.

Scarred: “I don’t think they ever abandoned their love for each other.”

I need to end this quickly, Tenzou swore to himself as he raced forward.

He would hurry back and bring Mary to rejoin the others.

...And I need to keep Mary-dono from unwittingly saying something dangerous!

If the battle continued for too long, the others could gather together and begin a sign frame conversation. As the 1st Special Duty Officer, he had already checked Musashi’s divine network. For some reason, “that ninja” was at the top of the most searched list, so this was dangerous enough already.

But blades danced before his eyes.

It was Unno Rokurou.

Based on what he had seen of her at IZUMO...

“Is this your normal fighting style!?”

“Don’t be dumb! This is still a dance! I just happen to be holding swords.”

Judge, he thought as he sent his own sword out toward Unno.

He could not stand still. He had to constantly take the initiative and attack. If he did not...

...I will be swallowed up by the dance!

Unno held a fan sword in each hand, but she was not gripping them and swinging them around. She used the rotation of the opened fans to provide the speed of her slashes and she adjusted how she held them in her fingers to direct them in the direction she wanted.

She used two at once not because she was predicting the gaps in his defenses and attacking then, but because the rotation of the fans made her attack automatically. The dangerous part was how she would sometimes pull back the hand operating the fan to shift the timing of the attack. But...

“This is nothing compared to fighting Lord Shibata...!”

He said that nice and loud to distract his enemy.

He was questioning her skill, but...

“Huh? Why are you comparing me to someone else? I’m a woman and he’s a demonic man. Why are men always in such a rush to compare people?”

...N-now she’s lecturing me!?

Tenzou did not let it get to him. To prevent her from using her fan swords, he primarily used jabs and short slashes that targeted her wrists. And to further distract her...

“Indeed! I love comparing people! I mean, you’re neither busty nor blonde!!”

He ended up criticizing her body, which she could not change. So...

“Oh, shut up. You can go after someone’s looks to her face?”

...Th-this isn't working!

“And do you actually think that’s funny or something?”

“N-not really.”

“Then why say it? Did you think I would like it?”

He felt like her attacks were pushing Excalibur back. In fact...

Me: “Is it just me or is she doing a great job of distracting you?”

Flat Vassal: “Eh? I thought he had started hitting on her.”

Mal-Ga: “If that’s his idea of hitting on her, then I feel *really* sorry for her. He’s not just a waste of time; he’s a waste of existence.”

Asama: “Oops, that was close. I almost sent that one to Mary.”

“Nooooo!”

Tenzou changed tack.

...I'll go in low!

Ninjas excelled at aiming for the legs. But...

“Right back at you.”

She too was a ninja.

Fan and sword clashed low to the floor and sparks flew.

...Kh...!

Her swords were speeding up. When she blocked his blade, she did not fight it and transformed the impact into an attack of her own.

He felt like his attacks were being returned with twice the strength. But...

“Ohh...!”

He had a target in mind.

...The thatch reed ring!

Ether formed a ring of thatch reeds and a mirror behind Unno. That was the source of the “water” covering the Ariake.

If he destroyed that, she would lose Yomi and the “water” would disappear.
But...

“Isn’t your sword a little too focused on defense?”

She was pushing him back. And...

“You’re after the gate to Yomi behind me, aren’t you?”

She had seen through it.

Unno looked at the ninja’s face.

She could not see it.

This was more than just the brim of his hat. It was probably a spell or an optical ninja divine protection. Instead, there was an expression display on the front of the hat, but it was currently set to be expressionless.

So as she sent out slash after slash to drive him back, Unno asked a question.

“You think only Excalibur can destroy that gate, don’t you?”

The ninja said nothing and held Excalibur close to deflect the fan sword aiming for his legs.

That was fine with her. She simply asked her questions.

“When Excalibur blocked the sword I threw earlier, it wasn’t affected by the ‘water’. I imagine a divine weapon must have some powerful divine protections.”

The ninja still did not answer, so...

“How about it?”

“N-n-n-n-no, I-I wasn’t th-thinking that at all.”

He was too obvious.

But, she thought while speeding up her swords. She no longer spun her entire body around. She simply swayed left and right and used the motion to send the fans rhythmically back and forth. And as she did so...

“...How about it!?”

Sparks scattered to the left and right.

I'll attack him as much as it takes, thought Unno.

She moved forward to distance the ninja from the gate to Yomi.

“Oh.”

She also pushed on the ninja to distance him from something else.

To their right and a bit to the north, the other Excalibur had fallen to the Ariake's armor.

The Excalibur the ninja currently held was freed from Yomi. That would be thanks to the spirit given to him by the English princess.

The power of Yomi did not work on him. So to prevent him from gaining or swapping out weapons, she needed to keep him away from that other sword. Even if Excalibur did decide on its own to fly toward him, she could deal with it as long as she kept it in her field of vision. And she could use the ninja as a shield to deter the princess waiting further back.

Unno pushed forward.

She worked to push him back. She swung her weapons left and right with large, speedy movements and then she closed the fans she held.

“Here goes.”

She gripped the thick bundles of blades in her hands and increased her attack speed.

More and more sparks scattered and the ninja kept low.

The dancer bent her body like a snake as she attacked.

The closed blades were like fangs as they brought destruction to the ninja from above and below or left and right.

The metallic sounds rang loud and the steel sparks scattered through the air.

The ninja kept up with the rapid exchange, but he was pushed back.

His feet scraped along the floor as he moved back, but...

“Kh...”

He held his blade diagonally and attacked again and again to push back at the left and right slashes.

But the dancer laughed in response.

“Ha ha...!”

The ninja was almost down on his knees now and the corners of the dancer’s mouth rose. She swayed to the left and right.

“Your head is mine!”

She launched an attack toward his face and the ninja blocked it.

Sparks flew and the impact shook only the ninja.

But what happened next was different from before. Before, the fan slash had been deflected at the moment of impact and that had kept the dance going. But this time...

“I won’t let go.”

The blade had previously used the bounce-back as a part of its rhythm, but now it was held against Excalibur by the ninja’s shoulder.

The dance had stopped. Or so it seemed. However...

“This one was the primary attack. ...See?”

The dancer sent the other fan toward the ninja. He was holding the left blade with his right shoulder, so he could not avoid the slash from the right blade.

Tenzou made a split-second decision.

He was holding the enemy’s left blade between his right shoulder and Excalibur. That was how he had defended against that left blade, but...

...I can’t move to the right!

And another blade was swinging in from the left.

The blade drew a diagonal curve, so he could not duck down to dodge it.

In that case, he decided.

...It's a gamble!

With that, he took action.

Unno saw the ninja abandon something.

He let go of Excalibur.

He removed both his hands from it.

“...Toh.”

And instead of standing up, he slid backwards.

He moved away. And that left...

“Damn you...!”

Unno's slash should have hit Tenzou from his left, but it would instead strike Excalibur.

But she dealt with Excalibur appropriately. The sword had been released into the air, but striking it between her two swords could do great damage to those swords.

So Unno pulled back the left sword which had been pressed against Excalibur.

Only the right sword struck Excalibur and it flew far off to the left and away from the battlefield.

Unno then gathered her hands together, lined up both fan swords, whirled her body around, and looked to Tenzou.

There he was.

The ninja was running toward the Excalibur that had fallen to the deck after blocking the earlier attack meant for the English princess.

“Kh...!”

Unno spun around and began the dance needed for her next attack.

Meanwhile, the ninja slid over and scooped up the other Excalibur.
At that very moment, Unno realized light was scattering behind her.
A metallic sound and sparks scattered there, leading to a certain result.
A light sliced horizontally through the center of the ether thatch reeds and the Yomi gate she had created.

“What...!?”

Unno looked back in time to see the destruction of the Yomi gate.

...How!?

She had eliminated one of the dangerous Excaliburs from the battlefield and the ninja held the other one.

The only external attack so far had been the Technohexen cannon fire, but...

...The stagnation makes that useless!

But then another possibility occurred to her.

“You, ninja!”

Unno shouted at the Musashi ninja holding Excalibur out toward her.

“Was that a diversion!?”

And she heard a sound behind her. She heard something metal rolling far to the northeast, which was behind her and to the right.

She knew what had fallen in that distant location.

...The previous Excalibur!

She had knocked it far to her left, but now it was far to her right.

What did that mean?

To find out, she turned to the southwest, which was to her left.

The god of war sniper unit and Musashi’s main group were there. Someone there had knocked back the Excalibur she had eliminated from the battlefield. And who of Musashi’s main group could fire so accurately?

“The two Technohexen!!”

As soon as she said that, an impact struck her right wrist.

It was a sniper shot.

...*Was that...*?

The Technohexen sniper fire that had once hit Yuri had shattered her fan sword as a warning.



Naito had placed her *schale besen* across the idiot and Horizon's heads and fixed it in place.

...That was close...

Tenzou's idea was simple enough.

...Excalibur is surrounded by the spirits that negate Yomi, so I'll throw it outside of Yomi's effects and you shoot it back in to slice apart the thatch reed Yomi gate.

It was simple enough to say.

But this was on the battlefield, with no practice, and with almost no advance warning.

If Kimi had not noticed what Tenzou was doing, they never would have made it in time.

Kimi herself was speaking with the Chancellor.

"Heh heh. How about that, foolish brother? It turned out just like I said it would, didn't it?"

"That was amazing, sis. That ninja woman's dance went just like you said it would."

"Judge. If her dance had really been an old Yamaga Shrine dance, I wouldn't have been able to see through it like that. But she must have become a Yamaga shrine maiden later in life, so she must not have fully mastered the Yamaga dance. ...And that means she remade some of the most important pieces into the more modern style she was used to."

So...

"At the most crucial points, her normal pattern shows through. And since those are the modern patterns, I know them as well as she does. The way she swayed back and forth is the same as my summit dance."

Even then, it was quite something to predict the movements of the dancer's opponent instead of just the dancer herself.

...Ugh.

Naito groaned in her heart. *Everyone in our class is at such a bizarrely high level.*

...Of course, I'm an Edel Brocken tester, a Special Duty Officer, and the top of the delivery business.

But even then she did not feel near the “top”, so there was definitely something wrong with this class.

And just as she started to wonder if she was using that to compromise in her desire for advancement...

“Gold Mar, I don’t really understand, but that was pretty amazing. How’d you do it?”

“Eh? Well, um, I just made a spur of the moment decision.”

“It’s fine, Margot.” Naruze walked up in her Weiss Hexen outfit. “Only you could’ve done that.”

“No, no. That only worked thanks to the guideline you drew, Ga-chan.”

“Then.” She smiled. “We’re amazing.”

Naito briefly thought about what that meant. And...

...I see.

Naito tilted her head and brought her cheek to Naruze’s. Then she pushed her cheek out of the way to...

“Thanks.”

She pecked at Naruze’s lips for a kiss.

Tenzou slowly circled in front of Mary and deterred Unno with Excalibur.

Defeating Unno was his top priority here, but...

“Not bad.”

He kept his guard up

She had stopped her dance and lowered her hips a bit. She turned her body to face south, probably with Naito’s sniping in mind.

But she did not immediately flee.

...Perhaps because she intends to keep my focus here.

She would also be keeping the attention of Naito's sniping, Excalibur, Asama, and the others assisting him.

Unno was sticking around to demonstrate that she could still use the Yomi gate spell if she needed to. If she fled, she would put her companions in danger.

"Such excellent teamwork."

They had defeated her technique, but the situation that caused was still troublesome.

...She intends to singlehandedly hold back a large group.

That was the original job of a ninja. So...

"I suppose I should hope that the rest of your team is defeated."

Narumi-dono and Futayo-dono's results will decide this one, thought Tenzou as he deepened his defensive stance toward Unno.

At that very moment, an explosion erupted on the west end of the Ariake.

Sanada's Mochizuki had thrown an explosive at Narumi.

Chapter 21: Close Centipede

CHAPTER 21

"Close Centipede"



What comes?

What bites?

What will not stop?

Point Allocation (Unturning)

What comes?

What bites?

What will not stop?

Point Allocation (Unturning)

Mochizuki saw the result of her explosion.

The small explosion spell had been narrowed down for anti-personnel use. It was small scale, but it had enough power to easily blow someone away.

However...

“Good evening.”

The falling smoke and flames were parted by Date Narumi.

She was unscathed as she walked forward. And...

...How?

Mochizuki did not understand. She had thrown an explosive as a counterattack. And she had matched it to Date Narumi’s timing.

She had predicted her enemy would pass through that, so she had prepared a second piece of coal which could completely crush her opponent.

Or it should have.

That “should” should not have existed for an automaton.

For an automaton, the result was determined in advance. There were times when they made a “should” estimation because their processing power could not keep up with their macro observations, but there were never any “shoulds” in the micro observations of a battle like this with little to interfere.

But the enemy was unharmed.

Her gait was light as she approached. Mochizuki worked her mind to figure out why.

...Understood.

Mochizuki reached an understanding. Date Narumi was *walking*.

Mochizuki had thrown her explosive based on the timing from when Date Narumi had been *running*.

Since she was *walking* now, the explosion had occurred in front of her and focused its power there.

...But the early throwing time was not a mistake.

After all, predicting she would be walking and throwing accordingly would have been dangerous. It was possible she could shift from a walk to a run.

So this decision had not been a mistake.

But this decision had not defeated the enemy.

And that enemy was approaching.

She walked forward.

Mochizuki prepared to move back.

“————?”

Date Narumi raised her right hand.

Her lightly spread hand held nothing. And there was no sign of her grabbing anything with it. But...

...I have determined this was unexpected!

Mochizuki realized she had stopped moving.

“Well done, Date Vice Chancellor.”

Gin heard Muneshige speak quietly while maintaining his defensive stance.

She followed his gaze toward Mochizuki.

And when Gin looked that way, Mochizuki did something odd.

Even though Narumi was merely walking, Mochizuki frantically began to move back but suddenly stopped.

...What is happening?

Gin asked Muneshige about it while she adjusted the aim of her anti-air fire.

“What kind of trick is the Date Vice Chancellor using there?”

“Judge. ...She intentionally placed herself at a disadvantage in two or three ways at once.”

And...

“She is using the advantages of an automaton against her opponent.”

That reminded Gin of something.

“Is that what you did the other day, Master Muneshige?”

“This is different from ‘Asakusa’ and the others.”

Muneshige had fought an automaton the other morning, but...

“Compared to the Date Vice Chancellor’s current opponent, I can see just how free a life Musashi’s automatons live. I can also tell just how many harsh battlefields the other nations’ automatons have seen. And...I know perfectly well what combat policy the Date Vice Chancellor has taken.”

That being...

“Pacifism. Or rather, she aims to surpass her opponent without even fighting.”

Gin knew what he meant. That had been the Date clan’s initial policy toward Musashi.

...They kept their distance from Musashi and tried to claim the history recreation that made them the ultimate rulers of Oushuu.

Even if they would have accepted Musashi after that, they had rejected any interference.

Of course, even if the Date Vice Chancellor advocated pacifism, she would know that fighting was inevitable.

She avoided combat because the explosive power of dedicating all of her strength to fighting was too dangerous. Unturning Centipede’s Paths of Countless Hundreds went well beyond an individual’s technique.

Also, when she did use that, she tended to make her attack in consecutive waves to provide a warning.

“When she does fight, she pursues her enemy, bites at them time and again, and lets them know how much of an advantage she has before finally ensnaring them and crushing them. ...Is that the way of Unturning Centipede?”

She had done that against Niwa when they fought P.A. Oda at Novgorod. She had secured her advantage on the battlefield using the consecutive ejection of Unturning Centipede’s parts and then she had made her attack on Niwa.

It was a strange contradiction.

She held back because she understood the danger she posed.

But when she decided to use her power, she did so without feeling a single pang of conscience.

And most likely...

...She stepped forward on this battlefield because she lacks Unturning Centipede.

Should you call it a prideful overestimation of her power?

Or should you call it a kind consideration for others?

But Gin also heard some whispering behind her.

“Strange... She was extremely belligerent with me from the beginning...”

“What’d you do to her, Uqui?”

“Only gave her some panties while playing a porn game and then fought her with a hammer.”

“That’s pretty high level stuff.”

“Um, Toori-kun, I don’t think that’s the issue...”

Perhaps some forceful interference had altered the Date clan’s policy from the outset there.

But without that here, the Date Vice Chancellor could handle this like normal.

“Here she goes, Gin. ...The Date Vice Chancellor is moving forward.”

This is a pattern, thought Mochizuki as she fell back.

This must be the usual combat pattern of Date Vice Chancellor Date Narumi.
Testament.

...She is going to repeatedly bite at me as a warning!

She would make her superiority known and, if her opponent continued to oppose her, she would prove that accumulated superiority by sending all of it her opponent's way to achieve victory.

Date's Vice Chancellor had already given several warnings.

When Mochizuki placed her memories on the chopping block of her decision making, she realized the warnings had begun from the first time that girl had blocked one of the explosives with her sword.

And that had done something to the timing of Mochizuki's explosions and the way she dodged the many sword strikes.

...She created a pattern in them!

Mochizuki had intended to avoid repeating a pattern in her attacks and evasions.

But the enemy had made her do so.

By defending, dodging, and attacking in the same way, Date's Vice Chancellor had given a pattern to Mochizuki's movements.

It was not that Date's Vice Chancellor could only defend or dodge, or that she could only make attacks that would not hit.

"I have determined she was guiding me by teaching me how to react to those actions!"

Mochizuki tried to fall back as Date Narumi walked toward her.

Mochizuki determined her opponent was dangerous, so she quickly prepared to move back.

"————"

Her body reacted to Narumi's light movements.

Date Narumi had made one of the "initial movements" that Mochizuki had unwittingly memorized.

It was the initial movement that Date Narumi always made before attacking.

And once she saw that movement, Mochizuki would not be making the "optimal reaction" if she did not dodge.

So she began to change her backwards movement into the optimal evasion.

...I have determined that is wrong!

The immediate change of intent dulled and stopped her movement.

This was a deficiency found in automatons.

What was normally a strength had been remade into a weakness by the series of events.

And the enemy had made a further warning earlier.

When faced with the defenseless Date Narumi, Mochizuki had determined whether or not she was an enemy. If she had settled on "not an enemy", this would not have happened.

That had been the final warning.

After preparing herself to overcome everything, Date Narumi was confirming her opponent's hostile intent.

Mochizuki had misread the situation.

Her primary mission was to buy time for the Shirasagi Castle to complete its preparations in the sky. So she had determined her goal matched that of Date Narumi who was making no attempt at a finishing blow.

But she had been wrong.

Her opponent had only been warning her while building up what she needed to overcome.

...If I do not fall back soon, she will ultimately crush me and sweep me away!

Mochizuki had made the wrong decision here.

She had mistakenly thought this was provocation and that she was a step away from victory.

But that had not been true at all.

“I have determined you were luring me in!”

There was a reason for the intensity at the end of her statement. Date Narumi had lightly moved her knee forward as she approached.

She was coming.

Automaton vision was fast. She could perceive all of her opponent’s movements. But that was precisely the problem.

“————”

She could not overlook the initial movement of an attack that she had been forced to memorize.

To conclude that this was something else, she had to confirm it for herself.

This was the same.

Even in her high-speed vision, she had to wait to see that Date Narumi’s leg was merely stepping forward instead of preparing to attack.

Her high-speed processing power was wasted.

It was a waste of time.

“When you can see everything, you have to react to everything,” said Date Narumi. “Let me guess. You should have been a good match for me. You should have been able to use your explosives to hold back the consecutive summoning of my mandible swords. You should have been able to hold back all of my attacks. You should have been easily able to defeat me. That’s how it *should* have been...right?”

The enemy spoke of should after should. And without a smile on her face.

“And that’s why a thought occurred to me.”

“What was that?”

“What would be good for dinner tonight? We had fish yesterday.”

Mochizuki did not understand.

But Date Narumi continued to approach. But as she approached, Mochizuki had a thought.

...If I keep things like this, her attacks can't reach me!

Yes, if the enemy attacked, she only had to dodge again.

If she made the appropriate response, the enemy could do nothing.

...And... She still had a secret technique.

Her opponent was not the only one with a trick up her sleeve.

And just as she sensed the possibility of victory, Date Narumi moved again.

She displayed the initial movement of an attack.

Oh, thought Urquiaga.

...Is she going to draw her sword here?

The half-dragon's eyes saw the prosthetic limbs track suit girl finally draw a sword from thin air.

She had moved in close, but her automaton opponent had excellent reaction speed. Swinging that sword would not hit her. So...

"That's right."

Urquiaga continued speaking before the confused crossdresser and the others could turn his way.

"She's powerful, but she doesn't hold back."

As he said that, Narumi made a certain movement.

She let go of the sword she had partially drawn.

Mochizuki determined her opponent had done something unexpected.

She had given Mochizuki an evasion pattern, looked like was using that for a feint, and...

...Did something else!?

Automatons always sought the optimal answer to the present situation.

They searched for that answer through calculations such as statistics and deviations, but most of all by searching.

Even when faced with a never-before-seen situation, there was a chance they had experienced, seen, or heard about a similar or equivalent action.

So that happened here. And...

“...Kh.”

She could not move until she found the answer.

She might find the optimal solution, so moving before it arrived might mean letting the optimal solution escape her. So...

...I...can't...

Mochizuki made an adjustment as the word “move” appeared in her mind.

She saw Date Narumi charge forward without a weapon in tow.

She had to strike back.

This was an enemy before her eyes. As she had previously determined, this was a hostile opponent.

The current situation did not matter. The previous reason remained: Date Narumi was a part of Musashi, so...

...She is defined as an enemy!

“———!”

Mochizuki moved. She moved back to avoid Narumi's approach.

And she swung her hand like usual.

...I have determined she cannot dodge this!

She threw her explosives as a counterattack against Narumi.

Narumi saw the coals approaching.

The explosives had been thrown toward her approach.

...So she managed to respond. Well done.

And so Narumi continued forward. She leaned forward for just an instant to pass between the coals.

From there, she did not rush herself and walked one step further forward than normal.

That dodged the attack.

Ahead of her, Mochizuki was already preparing the next attack.

“————”

Narumi felt heat like wind on her neck.

It was...

...The coals.

The five coals that glowed with a red light had supposedly passed by her, but they made a gentle turn and pursued her.

These were homing weapons. They were different from the previous coals that had only traveled in a straight line. Their movements gently wrapped around her at close range.

“...!”

And they exploded.

Mochizuki made her second throw.

She could not tell what had happened to Date Narumi.

This was a dangerous enemy, so she needed to throw more explosives.

...Obliterating her so nothing remains is the optimal solution!

Mochizuki used that decision to violently shake the air.

The many explosions surrounded her with smoke. The enemy was thoroughly hidden both physically and optically. Mochizuki knew what such an action was

called: fear.

She had no emotions, but this was a statistical decision.

After all, this enemy had surpassed what automatons excelled at and took pride in, and she had moved in to consume her. It was almost like...

“She is trying to make my existence meaningless...!”

All of these additional explosives were thrown in a straight line. They did not contain the gentle homing ability seen in the earlier ones. That was...

...My secret technique!

She had revealed her explosion spell that she only used as a last resort.

It was...

“A fuse, right?”

She heard a voice. It was Date Narumi’s.

Mochizuki briefly stopped moving.

But only for a moment. She soon launched more explosives. She sent a great tremor into the air.

But the voice spoke.

“Your explosion spell is formed from a fuse. You should have plenty of explosives stored in some other phase like a dual pitch space for when bringing weaponry along on a covert mission would be difficult.”

“I have determined you are discussing ‘shoulds’.”

“And you should have things set up so that the bombs stored in a phase space are ejected and detonated when the fire reaches the end of the fuse. And for a fuse, you use...”

She said it.

“Your hair.”

There was no “should” here.

“Your throwing action was fake. You used the throwing action to disguise that your gravitational control pulled out a hair fuse and threw it like a long needle. That was why the throwing action was always the same and the thrown explosives were always the same speed. And that made it easy to avoid once I had seen through it.”

“But how did you-...!?”

“Because you tried to hit me by manipulating the timing more than the speed or angle. It’s the same as trying to hit someone with a projectile fired at the optimal speed instead of just throwing it by hand. That told me you were launching something with your gravitational control instead of throwing the explosive.”

Mochizuki stopped making the throwing motion.

Her enemy had seen through it.

It was no use against this opponent.

“I thought you did quite well at the end there. ...You used nothing but straight-line throws the whole time and then released the gravitational control to give the hairs back some of their original limberness. The very air current I created by moving forward caught them and gave the fuses a gentle homing ability. A decent secret technique.”

She had seen through it all.

Mochizuki determined that every technique available to her had been crushed.

“How long did you know...?”

“Would it sound cool to say ‘from the beginning’?”

As for why...

“The smell. ...You were plotting to infiltrate the Ariake if possible, weren’t you? So you prepared a disguise and used Musashi products. ...That shampoo can overpower the smell of oil, can’t it? I’ve used it since last night.”

The wind reached the smoke.

A slight gap appeared in the smoke, creating a window-like slit. And when Mochizuki searched for the enemy through it...

...She's gone!?

"I'm over here."

She was down below.

At the bottom of the smoke convection, Date Narumi was seated on the Ariake's floor.

She had no arms.

There was no need to preface it with "most likely". To escape the timing of the explosion, she had abandoned the weights on her shoulders and dropped her body straight down.

The enemy had been in the same spot the entire time.

Which one was it that had lost sight of what mattered and instead viewed the wrong thing?

...I have determined it was me!

Mochizuki moved.

Nothing she could do would work any longer. So as if abandoning all that...

"...!"

She pulled out a bundle of hair with her gravitational control and fired it.

She lit the many fuses as Date Narumi got up from the floor.

"What if I attack with them all at once!?"

"You mustn't lose sight of your original objective."

Date Narumi ejected false arms onto her shoulders.

And not just one pair. The arms appeared like bullets being loaded into a magazine and she launched them toward Mochizuki.

They all took the same action she had used when attacking Mochizuki before.

She reproduced the attack enough times to reach the triple digits. The

prosthetic arms accurately carried out the task. But those arms held no weapons. So even more than before...

...Those attacks cannot reach me!

Just as Mochizuki made that decision and prepare to make her final evasion, she saw something.

The many arms performing their attack in midair were holding her fuses. And each arm held just the one hair.

Armless Narumi spoke calmly.

“Attacking with them all at once, you said?”

Then...

“That is what I’ll hit you with to defeat you.”

Mochizuki realized all of the explosions had hit her own body.

As she was smashed to pieces, she heard gunfire. That was the sound of Kakei’s attack.

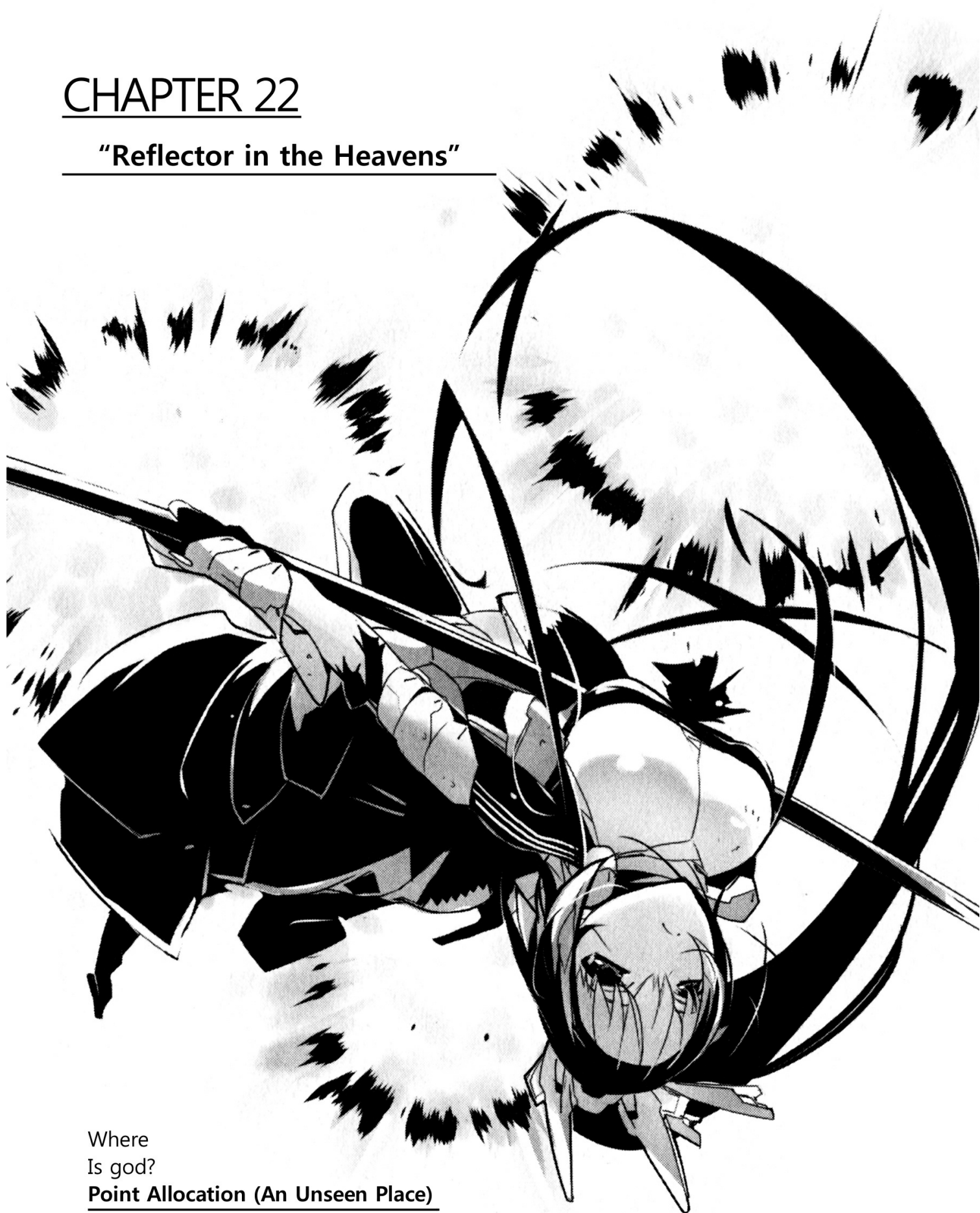
...Kakei-sama.

She heard 10 gunshots in a row. He was still firing at Musashi’s Vice Chancellor from point-blank range.

Chapter 22: Reflector in the Heavens

CHAPTER 22

"Reflector in the Heavens"



Where
Is god?
Point Allocation (An Unseen Place)

Where

Is god?

Point Allocation (An Unseen Place)

“Ohhhh...!”

Futayo turned back toward Kakei. She primarily attacked with the bottom of her spear while she made sure to...

...*Dodge!*

The gunfire arrived immediately afterwards. She had attacked from the right, but it came from the left. And the 10 shots appeared less than a centimeter away from the side of her face or her stomach.

The attack came from her blind spot.

But she had speed. She was swinging from right to left, but the axis of her feet had pulled off the previous footwork and bullet kicks.

So she leaped to the side and used her spear to...

“Block it!”

“Understood,” said the weapon.

An impact shook Tonbo Spare’s shaft. She used that to adjust the speed and direction of her leap so she could dodge the remaining bullets.

This was much like a *kata*.

When she knew where the attack was coming, this *kata* allowed her to accurately block it and use it for her next action.

And there was only one thing she could say about Kakei’s attack for making her think that way.

“Well done...!”

She had never thought she would experience gunfire like swordsmanship.

And since he fired 10 shots at once...

“You truly rival a master swordsman!”

“A ninja doesn’t want a samurai’s praise.”

Oh, right. My mistake. I shouldn’t look at everything from my own perspective.

But, thought Futayo.

There was something she understood now.

“Kakei-dono.”

She approached and was knocked back each time, but she was still gradually getting closer as she spoke. Even now, she was dodging the gunfire that appeared outside her field of vision.

“Your gunfire follows a certain rule, doesn’t it?”

“And what might that be?”

Since he asked, Futayo answered.

“All of your shots come from your own blind spots!”

Kakei smiled bitterly in his heart as he continued firing at Musashi’s Vice Chancellor.

She’s gotta have figured out how my shooting spell works by now.

Her evasions had grown quite sharp. She had focused on the attacks in her own blind spots and fully avoided them.

“Not bad, Musashi Vice Chancellor!”

“And you are doing an excellent job with your blind spot attacks!”

That was true enough. After all...

...My Blind Spot Delivery sends “something unseen” to “an unseen place”.

It was an object transmission spell.

He wished he could send things to “a seen place”, but he could not thanks to his affinity with the spell.

This had caused him a lot of trouble in the past.

He had initially trained in the ninja techniques of throwing needles or small projectiles.

Back when he was only throwing things via pure martial arts, his results had been second to none.

...They honestly had high hopes for me.

But in a real battle against someone who could use spells, martial arts alone were not enough.

So his training had begun to include throwing spells for use in combat.

And he found he was unable to use those spells properly.

Everyone else had been able to launch their projectile several hundred meters while he could only reach a few dozen meters at best. When he looked into it, he found that his launch spell was activating but not lending him its power for some reason.

It was a matter of affinity.

Affinity did not always work in the positive direction.

Like Musashi's Vice Chancellor, there were those who were loved by acceleration spells. Like him, there were those who had been abandoned by launching spells.

Spells were a means of gaining your god's approval and borrowing their power. Someone in the equation was not cooperating, but he had not known if it was him or the god.

The spell had not activated properly for him.

People had said all sorts of things about him. Some claimed his god had abandoned him. Others claimed he was unclean. And his excellent results with martial arts had only made the criticism stronger.

Some of his friends had helped him try to overcome the poor affinity, but even they had eventually realized it was no use and left him.

He had been quick to realize they had given up on him and he had been quick to change the subject to something harmless when they did speak with him.

At the time, he had thought it was all over for him, he had stopped attending training, and he had eventually started planning to live the life of a village laborer instead of a ninja.

But, thought Kakei.

“At one point, I figured it out.”

He had decided to throw it all away.

One day after classes let out at the academy’s middle school, he had decided to throw out everything he had done so he could live an easier life.

He had used his poor launching spell to throw his beloved throwing needle to the floor behind him.

And when he exited into the hallway, he had noticed something.

The throwing needle had stabbed into the hallway’s wooden floor.

...I don’t get it.

It had made no sense to him. At first, he had thought a *tsukumogami* residing in the needle had been expressing its reluctance to be thrown out, so he had taken it to the metalworking room and alchemy room to have it analyzed.

But they found nothing out of the ordinary.

He had felt his only option was to recreate the situation, but whenever he threw it while watching, nothing happened.

He had only figured out what was happening after dropping out of the training classes. Before summer break when everyone else was focused on the upcoming high school entrance exam, he had thrown a paper airplane in the classroom to ask a friend about their summer break plans.

To make sure the teacher did not notice, he had nonchalantly tossed the paper airplane to the side, but it had fallen back on top of his desk.

He had not known why, but he had known it was the same as with the needle.

He had wondered if his friend had returned it with some kind of spell, so he had tried it again.

“This isn’t what I’d call a talent.”

Sometimes a god took a liking to someone. Sometimes the opposite happened.

He did not know which one he was, but he remembered what his middle school homeroom teacher had said: “I think your god must want to take possession of your accurate line of fire and the tightening of your fingers as you take aim. They must want to adore them as their own.”

“They’d take those things from me?”

“Yes. ...Looking at it that way, you must have sharpshooting skills so great that your god is willing to rob you of your human rights for them. So look at it that way.”

And...

“Your god will always watch over the shots that not even you can see.”

He did not remember how he had responded.

But he had never returned to the firing lessons.

Because he had a goal.

...Once I get to high school, I’ll get into the Chancellor’s Officers. At the very least, I need to be a Special Duty Officer.

And the results could be seen now.

“God.”

Takei looked to the enemy as he spoke and blew fuse smoke from the corner of his mouth.

“Are you still watching my shooting?”

With that, the enemy arrived. She spun her body with all her might, and...

“———”

Musashi’s Vice Chancellor arrived right in front of him with smoke trailing behind her.

She had caught him.

Futayo saw Kakei move.

He took a back step.

But the movement began slowly. So...

...I can hit him first!

She charged in. She threw her body forward with all her strength to give herself too much momentum for any shots from behind to catch up.

“You’re mi-...”

But her shout was cut off.

Kakei seemed to collapse. And onto his back so that he stared up into the sky instead of at her.

He fell backwards, but...

...He is not looking at me!?

Then Futayo realized what this meant.

By looking up into the sky and collapsing, Kakei gained something.

“The greatest blind spot and evasion!?”

If he looked into the sky, the ground and everything to the horizon entered his blind spot.

So that was what he had done.

She knew he would fire soon thereafter. Would it be to her left, right, or back?

...Which will it be!?

It was the front.

It was a pure counterattack. He had not used this line of fire before now.

“Kh...!”

Soaring Wings contained great speed. Even if she leaped forward now, she would not gain much height while using Soaring Wings. And...

...A sound!?

From the left, right, and back, groups of bullets were fired at different heights. They joined the barrage in front of her to surround her.

They were going to hit her.

Bullets were approaching from all directions. So...

“...!”

Futayo took a certain action in response to the approaching bullets.

She made an intentional misstep.

“Heh heh. Now that was reckless.”

Kimi crossed her arms and spoke as the light at Futayo’s knees broke.

Soaring Wings had shattered. No...

...She shattered it herself, didn’t she?

Where had she learned that? No, she had probably just now thought it up. And in so doing...

“She will fly. ...It’s terribly simple, but it’s an idea that would never occur to me since I try to preserve the dance. I could learn something from this.”

The solid sound only now reached Kimi, but Futayo was already airborne. She had flown far above Kakei’s head.

Kakei saw the enemy.

She was in the sky.

He saw an arc flying high in the night sky.

It was the Musashi Vice Chancellor’s hair.

...She really did it.

The enemy had sent her acceleration spell out of control. Normally, she used that uncontrollable blast of acceleration to dodge when she could not otherwise avoid his attack.

...Did she get that explosion of acceleration to follow her own axis!?

It had to have been a split-second decision. Just how good was her combat sense?

But in the sky overhead, the Musashi Vice Chancellor completed a flip and began to fall.

The arc of her hair was tugged straight as she dropped down.

He would be in trouble if he stayed collapsed on the floor here. But...

“That’s fine by me.”

Kakei looked at the enemy and fired.

Not all blind spots were created by his field of vision.

“Your body creates a decent ‘home’ for my god.”

He could not see behind her.

So he took aim and offered the shots to his god.

He fired 10 times.

But he soon realized something.

“...?”

His bullets had not appeared behind the Musashi Vice Chancellor as she fell.

...What?

Kakei had never imagined this could happen, but he did not panic and simply pulled the trigger in his pants pocket.

But there was no sound or motion in the supposedly unseen area behind the Musashi Vice Chancellor’s back.

What is going on? he wondered. *Did my “affinity” betray me now of all times?*

But when he looked to the Musashi Vice Chancellor’s back as she fell, he saw something there: her spear.

“Oh.”

So that was it.

“Did you reflect your back with the spear tip so I could see it!?”

She had erased his blind spot.

...Dammit!

He shouted in his heart.

...God...!

“This would be so much easier if you had betrayed me...!”

Kakei kept his eyes on the opponent falling from the sky and he aimed a shot from his blind spot. He aimed a bullet from his right side as he lay collapsed on the floor.

“...!”

But just before he fired, she raised her voice.

“Bind! ...Tonbo Spare!”

Futayo realized Kakei had avoided a direct hit.

...Well done!

The trick was simple. Just before Tonbo Spare’s cut had hit him, he had fired from his blind spot to hit himself from the right.

The impact rang loud, his body doubled over and flew to the side, and he was hit just a bit by the cutting power.

The Ariake’s surface armor shattered and Kakei was caught in the middle of it. After flying to the left, the cut from above smashed his right shoulder and slammed him into the surface armor.

But by the time Futayo landed...

“Thanks. ...For using a projectile in the end.”

Someone stood there.

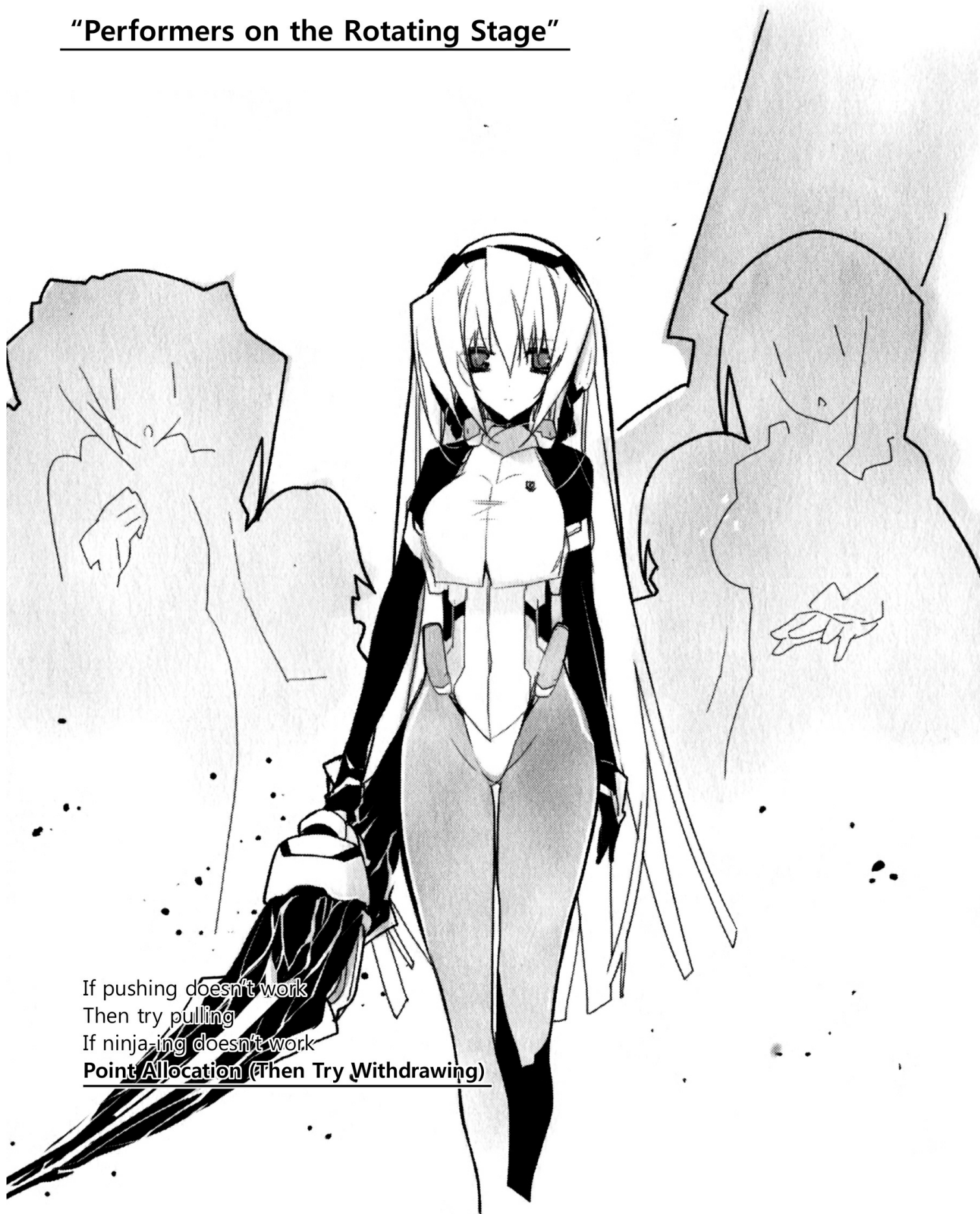
And it was not Kakei alone.

There were 3: Kakei, Unno, and Mochizuki who was broken and sitting on Unno's shoulder.

Chapter 23: Performers on the Rotating Stage

CHAPTER 23

"Performers on the Rotating Stage"



If pushing doesn't work
Then try pulling
If ninja-ing doesn't work
Point Allocation (Then Try Withdrawing)

If pushing doesn't work

Then try pulling

If ninja-ing doesn't work

Point Allocation (Then Try Withdrawing)

"Well, this is hopeless."

Mitotsudaira heard Kakei speak.

He stood on the west end of the Ariake and his left shoulder was bent at an odd angle.

His right forearm was also limp.

But two other figures seemed to rise up behind him.

...That would be Mochizuki and Unno, wouldn't it?

Mochizuki was almost entirely destroyed and sitting on Unno's shoulder. Unno had lost most of her equipment and blood dripped from her right hand.

Then Kakei spoke.

"We gave it our all, but that wasn't enough. ...Isa chose to fight to the death at this point. But there's another option. Isn't there, Musashi? If you give it your all and that isn't enough..."

Then...

"We'll make a comeback with a new meaning of 'our all'."

"Are you accepting our policy?" asked Mitotsudaira.

Kakei shook his shoulders.

"That comeback could always be a fight to the death, right?"

"Hey,"

A sudden voice interrupted as someone stepped forward. It was the crossdresser.

"Don't be so quick to think about dying. Are you small animals or something?"

Do I need to rub your nose in it?"

"I really don't want to know what you mean by that. And as the losers of the history recreation, we're in no position to accept a major nation no matter how the interpretations work out."

That's true, thought Mitotsudaira. Even Musashi had been helpless against Hashiba in the resolution of Mikatagahara. And they had needed to consider the situations of the three nations during the meeting with Oushuu.

They were in no position to do whatever they pleased.

...And it has to be even worse for a small nation like Sanada.

At that point, a certain thought occurred to Mitotsudaira. And Asama seemed to have realized the same thing. They exchanged a glance, and...

"My king."

She started to speak, but...

"Kakei-sama was it?" Horizon tilted her head and then spoke to Kakei's group. "In that case, you can come join us if you ever feel like it."

Asama gasped.

To her right, Mitotsudaira looked like she had hurriedly shut her mouth. And Asama was fairly certain she knew what that expression meant.

...Mito was thinking the same thing, wasn't she?

"Heh heh," laughed the idiot sister as she moved between Asama and Mitotsudaira and placed her hands on their shoulders from behind.

The other two girls simultaneously brushed off Kimi's hands and they exchanged a sidelong glance.

"You sure have let a certain someone influence you, Mito."

"I could say the same about you, Tomo."

For that matter, Horizon was the same. As for Kimi...

...Kimi doesn't often let her thoughts reach the surface, but it happened to her

long ago.

But, thought Asama as she took a breath.

Asama: “I never thought Horizon would have a Toori-kun kind of idea.”

Gold Mar: “So we don’t need the Chancellor anymore?”

Me: “Wait! Waaaiit! Horizon can’t do nudist gags or crossdressing gags!”

Silver Wolf: “My king! My king! You’re only helping the case against you!”

Hori-ko: “Phew... So I’ve taken another step into the lead...”

Asama did not really understand, but she was glad she was not caught in the middle of it.

Anyway, she thought as she looked to their opponents.

The three of them still stood there within the remnants of the smoke.

Unno realized Mochizuki’s entire body had gone tense while sitting on her shoulder. That meant Mochizuki could not fully control her own body at the moment...

...And she can’t make a decision here.

Unno honestly thought the Musashi princess’s suggestion was a feasible one.

By joining the winning side, they would have stability, even if that side’s victory was only an apparent one crippled by interpretations.

In the current Warring States period, it was common for powerful people to change academies. And Musashi did in fact contain skilled people from other nations.

Unno asked Mochizuki a quiet question.

“Can we call that suggestion the pride of the victor?”

“Unfortunately, Kakei-sama’s argument was that the losers cannot have their way in life. So as the future winners, they have suggested the entirely possible solution of, ‘Why not join the winning side?’ ”

“Is that like a short person envying a tall person and having the tall person tell

them, 'Come join me and you'll grow taller'?"

Then...

"They're taking away our position as the losers. ...Couldn't we accuse them of refusing to treat us like losers and using their victor's pride to force us to join them?"

"We cannot. Musashi's princess said 'if you ever feel like it', so she only made a suggestion and is not attempting to take anything from us. And the 'ever' does not set a time limit on the offer either."

"Then..."

"Testament. That means we can join them as the losers. It also means we can also wait until everything is over and we have lost everything, including our inherited names."

That was well stated, thought Unno.

"So whether we're losers or winners is determined by our own decision, is it?"

"So the Leviathan princess speaks of the Uroboros?"

Tomoe Gozen smiled a little while tying together a wooden frame to support a fruit tree on the dark slope of an orchard.

"They accept and cut apart the destiny of winning and losing. That is the method Musashi is recognizing and creating. They do not trample anyone underfoot, but they do not immerse themselves in pity either. They gain as much as possible through a flat relationship."

Tomoe Gozen took a breath and rested her hands.

The corners of her mouth rose as she looked down at Magdeburg where reconstruction was well underway.

"Hey, Matsunaga, can you hear me from the afterlife? ...Musashi really has overcome your death and gained the soul needed to face a destroyer."

She grabbed one of the fruits growing on the tree.

The pear was not quite ripe yet and she bit into it with the side of her mouth.

“It’s still a bit sour. Unsurprising at this point. But...” She observed the bite mark. “First the sprout is planted, grown, supported, and protected from the wind and rain. Only after all that does it grow into a great tree. And then it can supply its blessings and shade to many more people than helped it grow.”

“Are you saying that is the path Musashi has chosen?”

“Oh. You were here, Guericke?” Tomoe Gozen sat down on the slope and took another bite of the fruit. “I still don’t know what will happen.”

But...

“Long ago...Yoritomo, the others, and I aimed for that path, lost sight of it, and failed to reach it.”

“Do you expect them to reach it?”

“I am turning a blind eye to the fact that you are sending them the results of your defense barrier research without permission.”

It seemed to take Guericke a moment to realize what she meant.

“I see,” he said. “Once the pears are ready, I must send them some.”

“We’ll interact with them for the summer events. Send them then.”

“They will still be sour then.”

“That’s perfect for them.” She took a large bite. “Don’t grow too sweet, Musashi. ...Be the victors who treat the losers as your equals. Don’t you forget that.”

“I see. So that is the Musashi way.”

Kakei heard the overhead shellfire continue as if to criticize them for speaking with the enemy.

The din of battle sounded from all around, but he felt he could speak at least for now.

“So will Musashi accept us?”

“Yeah,” said the crossdresser as he adjusted the crotch of his shrine maiden

outfit. “That’s how Musashi’s always been. We’ll accept all the other nations’ awkward people.”

He fixed the crotch, slapped his butt, and shouted “right?” at the others.

...What an awful academy...

Takei thought that from the bottom of his heart, but there was one thing he had to say.

“I have no intention of making friends with you. I have an obligation to our current home.”

“As do I.”

He sensed Unno and Mochizuki nodding behind him. But Musashi’s princess had more to say.

“Please answer me this: is that something you are willing to accept death over?”

“...That is not an easy question.” Unno spoke from behind him. “I can’t exactly answer that until I’ve looked death in the eye, can I?”

Then you’ll never be able to answer it, thought Takei, but he made sure to hold his tongue.

Novice: “Then she’ll never be able to answer it, will she? Logically speaking.”

Four Eyes: “Did you hear that? This literary boy thinks he knows something about logic.”

Gold Mar: “But it looked a bit like that Takei guy wanted to say something just now.”

Mal-Ga: “It did, it did. I’m glad I got a sketch of it.”

Horizon determined that Unno’s response made sense.

So she bowed to those three.

“Judge. True enough. ...That was indeed a difficult question. Let us call it a

tie.”

“S-sure...”

Unno felt obligated to nod back and Kakei shook his shoulders as he turned to the side.

Novice: “They’re planning to withdraw. Find a good opportunity and keep them from escaping.”

That’s true, silently agreed Horizon.

The battle was not over. And they would understand that. So...

...Find a good opportunity?

The shellfire was shattering defense barriers in the sky.

Kakei spoke below the light of the falling ether shards.

“By my estimation, we will face each other again before long, Musashi. Possibly as soon as a few days from now.”

“You are suggesting a rematch?”

“Next time, I expect it’ll be a home game for us. I don’t know who you’ll end up facing, though.”

He spat the fuse out of his mouth. And...

“Bye.”

Horizon nodded and bowed.

“Take care.”

Horizon performed a quick-draw with Maska Orge.

A transparent and wavering power flew from Horizon to the Sanada trio.

And 3 silhouettes on the western side of the Ariake were hit and blown away. But...

“Those were replacement dolls, weren’t they!?”

Hearing Tenzou’s voice, Muneshige fell to his knees.

Gin gasped and looked back.

“I-I am so very sorry, Master Muneshige! I failed to predict this one!”

Horizon stared down at Maska Orge and nodded.

“Nice average.”

“I-is that how it works?” asked Mitotsudaira. “Is it!?”

“Heh heh. Since that Sanada group managed to keep up with Horizon, I say they would fit in pretty well here on Musashi. Don’t you think?”

Novice: “And Ariadust-kun! You used Aspida Phylargia’s energy for that shot, didn’t you!? Please think more strategically!”

Hori-ko: “Not to worry. I still have the True Muneshige Cannon. ...Although it has yet to accomplish anything.”

Tachibana Wife: “Master Muneshige! Master Muneshige!! Now your eyes look twice as dead!?”

Me: “Dammit... I wish I had a Logismo Oplo so I could have a trademark gag like that.”

Wise Sister: “Oh? You do, foolish brother? Hey, Asama, is there any kind of gag like that for him? If not, give him a nice big one! Y’know, big like those boobs of yours! C’mooooon!”

Asama: “Uh, it’s not like I can just think up a gag on demand. I tend to stumble across them...”

Silver Wolf: “Yeah, your trademark gag really only works with you...”

Asama: “I nearly agreed with you on reflex, but that’s not true, is it!? Is it!?”

However, a wind blew in to intrude on their exchange.

That wind was a noise. It was a low straining sound in the sky.

Naomasa looked out from the Ariake and shouted to the others.

“The Shirasagi Castle’s 2nd unit has finished its preparations! It’s on its way here!”

Chapter 24: White Heron in the Changing Night

CHAPTER 24

"White Heron in the Changing Night"

The wings that shine in the night
The strength to pass through the darkness
The heart to conquer the shadows
Point Allocation (Showdown)



The wings that shine in the night

The strength to pass through the darkness

The heart to conquer the shadows

Point Allocation (Showdown)

“The shellfire sounds like it’s getting closer...”

Masazumi sighed on the lift as it neared the Ariake’s ceiling.

...We got through Sanada, so now it’s the Shirasagi Castle again.

How should I look at this? she wondered. *The Shirasagi Castle has both of its units back, so should I say that we “got through” Sanada or that we let them buy the time they needed?*

That interpretation would become a topic of discussion when using the Musashi’s war power as a bargaining chip with other nations.

Sanada had done their job against Vice Chancellor level opponents. And they had exposed the status of Musashi’s war power.

Of course, they had sacrificed themselves to do so.

...That’s a method Aoi really doesn’t like.

Musashi had done well in that sense because they had not let Sanada sacrifice themselves.

“But the problem with a public position is that we can’t just say all’s well that ends well because everyone’s safe.”

“You have my sympathies.”

Masazumi nodded when she heard Munenori’s voice from somewhere.

“Are Kanou and the others doing well?”

“Judge. The management processing for Musashi residents is back to full capacity now that the remodeling is complete, so they are searching again for any spies. ...Of course, some people might be spying even if it is not their specialty, so they will be transferred down for maintenance to the land port on

the surface.”

“Yeah,” said Masazumi. “The land port’s transport ship temporary city is a real waste.”

“Judge. Ookubo-sama thinks we can turn it into the Shirakawa Headquarters for the Oushuu trade route you proposed. She has been holding meetings with the Industrial Committee, Lifestyle Committee, and Construction Division every evening lately.”

“So she isn’t paying any attention to you?”

“Th-that is not what I meant.”

“Now, now,” she said while waving her hand in what she hoped was an upperclassman-y way.

On her sign frame, she could see Takigawa had finished moving the Shirasagi Castle into place.

“Neshinbara, how are things?”

“That’s so cool...! Seeing the Shirasagi Castle outside of stealth is rare, so I need to get a bunch of recordings while I can. After all...”

She could hear the smile in his voice through the divine transmission.

“We’ll need to at least do some serious damage to it if we’re going to relieve the stress we’ve built up from all these shell hits.”

“I’m glad to see you’re doing well. So take care of this. Of course, I’m monitoring the situation on my sign frame and I’ll have to make some adjustments to the more dangerous statements all of you make.”

“Judge. ...At any rate, it’s begun.”

“What has?”

She knew the answer, but she asked anyway.

“A direct fight between Hashiba and us. A new age has finally arrived. We’re acting as Houjou’s mercenaries here, but we won’t receive any support from Houjou. This battle is P.A. Oda’s Takigawa and her Shirasagi Castle against Musashi.”

“This isn’t about historical romance. Restraining Hashiba here will benefit Oushuu and Kantou and it will guide Musashi to an advantageous position at the Peace of Westphalia. Our gathering of the Logismo Oplo is competing against P.A. Oda’s Genesis Project, so this confrontation is crucial. And...”

And...

“We can’t accept Hashiba’s methods that prioritize speed even if that requires sacrifice.”

That’s Aoi’s policy, but it’s ours too now, thought Masazumi. So...

“Neshinbara, drive the Shirasagi Castle out of Kantou. That will force P.A. Oda to focus on us and demonstrate to the other nations that P.A. Oda’s exclusive dominance is over.”

“You should be telling that to more than just me.”

“That’s not true.” She smiled bitterly. “We already know what needs to be said here. It’s the same thing Aoi said before: Let’s see who’s the strongest.”

With this battle, they were finally doing that. But...

“Do your best up there.”

She heard a great noise. It was the Shirasagi Castle’s shellfire pounding on the Ariake’s upper surface. She occasionally heard a creaking sound like it caught on something, but that likely meant a shell had hit where the armor had been stripped away.

Masazumi corrected her expression and asked a question.

“What’s the situation?”

“The Shirasagi Castle is now keeping their distance and firing on us from their outer range. The god of war snipers can reach, but their aim is unreliable. That would change with some specialized guided shells, but god of war sniper rifles are rare and we apparently don’t have any spells that match them. So we’re doing everything we can at the moment,” said the Secretary. “Yes, no matter what happens here, we’ll manage. You can count on us.”

Shellfire poured down on the Ariake.

The general flow of events was the same as before: The Shirasagi Castle had split into 2 units which were constantly firing while covering for each other's blind spots. But...

"Damn! Those Shirasagi Castle ships are further away than before!"

The enemy was distant.

"Can the god of war sniper unit hit them!?"

"No! When they're this far away, they can cautiously move their ships out of the way!"

"So we can only hit with a fluke, but they can hit us anywhere they want and wear us down!?"

The Ariake was just too large a target.

That size meant it was not easily destroyed, but that only went so far.

The armor on the upper surface had already been greatly destroyed and the tertiary armor, their final hope, was halfway destroyed in a lot of places.

Taking any more hits would be dangerous. And because they knew that, everyone from the Ariake and the Musashi was in a hurry.

" 'Ariake' here. 'Musashi' and I have worked together to put together a new defense barrier pattern. I will send you all the locations of the safe zones, so please move there ASAP. Over."

More and more barriers appeared in the sky. They turned to light as the shells shattered them. And as that light shined on everyone...

"Hurry to your posts!"

The general units had to move the most. Individual-use spells and weaponry could not attack the Shirasagi Castle. But they were crucial for observing and tracking the Shirasagi Castle and it was possible the Shirasagi Castle would send down more individual enemies. Personnel needed to be deployed as a deterrent for that.

And everyone noticed something.

The defense barriers were appearing in certain locations more than others.

“Aren’t those the spots where those light bombs hit!? Did the Shirasagi Castle use the time Sanada bought them to determine where those were!?”

Solid sounds came from the floor atop the Ariake. Everyone looked to the west side of the Ariake and found the floor tilting shallowly.

The armor itself had not been destroyed, but a 20-meter square panel was clearly floating up.

An atmosphere of “eh?” hung over them all, but a few of them caught on and quickly began moving.

“Did the welding come apart there!?”

On the Shirasagi Castle’s bridge, Takigawa lowered her shoulders in relief.

The *insha kotob* by her hands displayed a diagram of the Ariake with the effective attack locations indicated with red, but...

“The light got in between the primary and secondary armor when the Descending Light Bombs hit. From there, we only have to make some calculations based on what we know about the division of Ariake’s armor to find where the Descending Light Bombs were fired near the armor anchoring points. By firing further shells there and simply bending the armor, we can tear up a wide region of the primary armor to expose what lies below.”

According to the calculation results on her *insha kotob*...

“There are 85 such locations. And we can fire on them all we want.”

The sky out the window glowed red.

The main cannons had taken aim and fired based on the data sent to them.

They all fired at once.

A slight movement ran through the Ariake.

But this was not the same as the vibrations from the shells hitting it.

“The armor is being torn away! The frame is going to bend!”

Just like solidifying mud would split, black lines ran through the armor panels connected to the ones torn away by the shellfire.

The removal of the armor altered the tension in the frame it was attached to. Especially in the center of the Ariake, the surrounding influence pulled hard on the frame and caused connecting bolts and welds to burst apart below the floor.

And then even more shells fell from the sky.

“Is the ground cracking apart...!?”

That was exactly what happened in the center of the Ariake.

Intermittent cracks ran along the white upper surface and the armor panels were lifted up by a texture much like a thin layer of cracked ice. Below that, the secondary and tertiary armor had also split and the ether fuel pipes passing between them had burst.

Glowing fog and smoke erupted above the Ariake.

“This will prevent the top from opening! We need to hurry the repairs!”

As everyone shouted and moved, the rising billows of smoke grew in number and even more shells fell from the sky.

Roaring noises dropped from above.

Unno had chosen to withdraw by jumping down from the Ariake. As she fell, she saw the battle resume overhead.

Then Mochizuki spoke after moving from Unno’s shoulder and into the air.

“I have determined the Shirasagi Castle’s shellfire is much more accurate than before.”

“Well, they wouldn’t have wasted that time. This is the battlefield. Musashi was observing the Shirasagi Castle and this means Takigawa was doing the same to them.”

The Ariake, Musashi, and Shirasagi Castle all required largescale national

power to operate.

“Dammit...”

“I say we did pretty well against such a large nation,” said another voice.

It was Kakei. He was falling a bit further down and to the right.

“To be honest, I don’t feel like I was alive.”

He pulled something from his pocket, tore them up, and threw them away.

They were charms. One for ninja-specific physical enhancements and one to block pain.

“So you were right at the limit with those? ...And it took that to only just barely reach the Musashi Vice Chancellor’s level?”

“I’ll do better next time, so one’ll probably do. And if I did that well against the Vice Chancellor, I’ll do even better against the others.”

“You really like looking down, don’t you?”

Only after saying that did Unno take a breath of laughter. And Mochizuki also spoke while falling down from overhead.

“I would also like to return to my original duty.”

“Yeah, you never were meant for combat. We only pushed you into it.”

“Don’t act like you’re the boss just because you’re almost entirely untouched...” complained Kakei.

“Oh, shut up,” said Unno as she glared at him before looking back up into the sky.

She could hear the shellfire there. And...

“I suppose Takigawa is going to withdraw from Kantou here, lose the Battles of Shizugatake and Komaki Nagakute, and reach the end of her career.”

“That won’t be the whole story. She’s a P.A. Oda leader.” Kakei sighed as he fell. “Honestly. ...What were we even doing here? Were we fighting for Takigawa who’s under real pressure to preserve P.A. Oda’s reputation...or were we fighting for our own reputation even as we’re forced to withdraw?”

“Eh?”

Kakei did not say any more. But Mochizuki...

“There is movement in the sky. The pattern is somewhat different from before. The Shirasagi Castle is keeping their distance as they fire so that they can avoid any simple return fire. They must intend to wear down the Ariake.”

“That’s certainly a passive choice.”

“But an effective one. They can accomplish a unilateral bombardment,” said the automaton. “So this will tell us just how many steps ahead Musashi predicted this battle.”

“Dammit...!”

The Ariake’s upper surface was torn away and worn down.

The shellfire from the enemy’s main cannons was not continuous, but the secondary cannons filled the gaps and their shells raced across the Ariake, primarily where the ground had split.

Thy had yet to find an effective countermeasure against the long-range shellfire. They of course had defense barriers in the sky and those protected against most of it, but those could do nothing when the angle of fire suddenly changed. As for why...

“The automatons are controlling them from inside.”

The Musashi and Ariake’s gravity defense barriers were meant for accidents such as fires or a crashing transport ship or for stray shells when passing by near a battlefield. The automatons had removed their limitations so they could use the Ariake and Musashi’s power for combat defense instead.

These were originally meant to avoid battle while using the stealth defense barrier. But...

“The automatons can only see out with the Ariake and Musashi’s sight devices and those aren’t built for combat!”

“That’s why we’re helping out by tracking the enemy and taking readings!”

Everyone exchanged a glance and nodded. Then...

“I’ll send the data to ‘Musashino’-san!!”

“How naïve! Her aide, ‘Nishi Kokubunji’-san is getting a lot more attention recently!”

“It’s gotta be ‘Okutama’-san for me! The other day, she waved at me through the window while holding a rag!”

“She was only washing the window. She’d never wave at you.”

“She would! She so would! I know what I saw!”

A shell hit nearby, so they all screamed and evacuated. Meanwhile...

“Hey! Over here! We need to replace the armor panels!”

“The damage has reached the tertiary armor in places! We need to place some primary on top of that as a stopgap measure!”

“Light god of war unit! Throw on some back armor and get up here!”

They worked on repairs in the middle of battle.

But the shellfire continued as if to stop them. Their materials were blown away and the fragments injured people. All the while, they glared up into the night sky.

“It’s about time for a main cannon volley!”

“Damn! Just you watch, Shirasagi Castle! Our freaks will put you through hell!”

“That’s right! And after they put you through hell, it’s negotiations and then war! But the true hell awaits you when they force you to listen to some really lame jokes!”

“Oh! The officers are doing something!”

Something was happening at the god of war sniper unit to the southwest which was quickly becoming the headquarters for the officers.

Someone stepped forward to face the shellfire falling from the sky.

It was the crossdresser in a Y-pose. He maintained that Y and smiled as he

spun around for a full 360 degrees and clapped his hands over his head.

“Okay! Hey, everyone! We can’t have them targeting you, so I’ll draw their fire for you!”

Whether working or evacuating, everyone pointed their right thumb downwards in unison.

“No one asked for you!”

“Huhh!?” The crossdresser pointed at the group. “What was that for!? I work great as bait! I mean, I’m the Chancellor and Student Council President! It’s cause they were chasing me before that we managed to make that Shiratori Castle go boom!”

“Yes, yes.” Horizon expressionlessly nodded behind him. “That is an eternal embarrassment for them.”

“Huh!? Was that a compliment, Horizon!? Don’t make me blush!”

Mores shellfire flew in. And as one row of shells arrived out front...

“Watch out, Toori-sama.”

Horizon kicked the idiot forward.

Everyone cried out as the crossdresser nearly plunged right into the row of shells, twisted around, and dodged them.

Then the shells hit and shattered the defense barriers in the sky before passing by overhead.

“I said to watch out, Toori-sama.”

“For you!? That’s what you meant, isn’t it!? Isn’t it, Horizon!?”

“Judge. I have a dangerous aura about me.”

Just as she said that, vermilion light raced through the sky.

The volley from the Shirasagi Castle’s main cannons was directed toward the torn up portion of the Ariake’s armor.

When the idiot saw that, he quickly took an X-pose.

“The Ariake’s done forrrrrr!”

The idiot bent backwards and someone else spoke from nearby.

It was Asama. She glanced over at the idiot, and...

“Yes, yes. I’ll handle it.”

She pushed the “submit” seal on her sign frame. And before the enemy shells arrived...

“Submitted.”

She took a light step with her right foot.

A moment later, something appeared around her, the Suzaku, and...

“Ariake targeting divine protection spell ‘Branch and Leaf Connection’: activated!”

A circular direction marker spread out to surround the Ariake.

Torii appeared to indicate the 4 cardinal directions and more appeared for the 4 ordinal directions. There were also gradations between those and detailed rotation lines for observing the enemies above or below. The giant bluish-white tracking and targeting system formed a hemisphere that surrounded the Ariake’s upper surface.

It spun.

Torii slid along the detailed rotation lines to observe the sky and specialized sign frames pursued and predicted the enemy’s location along the gradations and torii arranged in every direction around them.

All of that observation data was sent to the linked defense barriers. The linked systems worked to automatically correct the defense positions for the rapidly-moving enemy.

Branch and Leaf Connection locked onto one attack first of all.

“We have a lock on all of the shells from the enemy main cannons!”

The rotation observation torii had locked onto all of those flying shells. And

they also predicted where the shells would hit.

The Ariake and Musashi used Branch and Leaf Connection as a bridge to share that data.

“Defending! Over.”

The light from the shattering defense barriers grew noticeably brighter. And...

“How about that!?”

As if in response to Asama’s question, the barrier hits exploded with light overhead.

The sounds of attacks chained together and a flare of ether light appeared in the sky above the Ariake. But even if fragments scattered down...

“The enemy’s main cannons were blocked!! Over!”

Everyone cheered.

Tracking lines and torii raced through the sky and defense barriers continually appeared to protect the Ariake.

The sounds of shell hits were now mostly shattering sounds in the sky instead of solid impacts on the Ariake’s upper surface.

The direction marker in the night sky had no power. But everyone in the general units understood what was happening, so they threw their hands in the air and cheered. The massive general defense system at work overhead was...

“All thanks to our endurance and technology!”

This was the result of the accumulated recordings taken while the enemy shellfire had hammered them this whole time.

By pouring that gathered data into a direction marker system with no actual power but massive processing power, it could assist the management and reactions of the defense barriers.

The defense had been entirely left up to the automatons’ decisions until now, but they had more than that now.

“Now we’re supporting the automatons!”

“Yes,” they all agreed. “I’ve always wanted to do that!!”

On Musashino’s bridge, “Musashino” supported Suzu’s shoulders from behind and nodded at what everyone said.

“I truly regret that the people must work to assist us automatons. But...”

The sign frame next to her displayed Sakai who had received a teacup from “Musashi”. He took a sip and...

“Just think of it as being given a new tool to help with your work.”

“Judge. Sakai-sama, if ‘Musashi’-sama ever asks for similar arrangements, please comply. Over.”

She then looked to Suzu’s hands. The girl had created a model of the Ariake and its surroundings.

“I saw...this!”

It was the Shirasagi Castle. She pushed its model forward with a tossing motion and it moved around the Ariake’s model like a fish. The model had split in two and both pieces drew ether lines behind them.

“Is that their trajectories!? Thank you very much, Suzu-sama. I will submit this data to the others. Over.”

Everyone atop the Ariake noticed something below the defense barriers protecting them from the sky.

“We’re receiving feedback to our targeting!”

The firing squad and other gunners could not hide the excitement in their voices.

Shinto prayer texts were scrolling rapidly through their targeting spells. And those contained...

“We’re receiving targeting corrections from Branch and Leaf Connection!

Both for extreme long-range and defense management!”

Everyone looked toward the group that was constructing and using this.

On the Ariake’s southwest corner, they saw the god of war sniper unit and...

“That’s the Asama Shrine’s sniper shrine maiden for you!”

“Who are you calling a sniper shrine maiden!?”

While Asama protested, the god of war sniper unit was stationed on the Ariake’s southwest corner.

When firing on the Shirasagi Castle as it flew in a circular path through the sky, a corner of the Ariake’s rectangular shape put them as close as possible. So...

“Oh, hell. I wish we could’ve changed positions and gone to an ocean-side corner. On the mountain side, updrafts blow in at unpredictable times.”

Naomasa complained while having Jizuri Suzaku fire its rifle from a kneeling position.

She was answered by Mitotsudaira who held up four 5m square armor panels with her silver chains and used them to protect everyone from the fragments and falling objects more than the shells themselves. She sighed.

“The Ariake is large. ...The climate is actually different on different parts and that can change our tactics. But there are some things we can do specifically by staying put in the same place. For example, using our accumulated data on the enemy’s movements to assist our sniper fire.”

“Judge. It’s a pain, but we’ll just have to put something together.”

With that, Naomasa had Jizuri Suzaku stand up.

“Asama-chi!”

“Yes,” responded Asama before clapping twice. Three targeting spells appeared in front of Jizuri Suzaku’s face, in front of Naomasa’s face, and above the muzzle of the rifle.

These were sniper targeting spells meant for long range and a moving target.

Asama managed the spells on a sign frame while she spoke to Naomasa.

“I’ve added in a predictive adjustment based on the accumulated data. But the Suzaku has been temporarily authorized as an Asama Shrine defender, so the central coordinate is based on the Musashi, not here. Keep that in mind.”

These spells were meant for god of war sniping, but the estimated distance exceeded 20km at the maximum.

...My shot will have the line of fire purified and that will stabilize it even with such a long range. But...

When sniping using only a targeting spell, a human-sized rifle gained a max range of around 2km. The effective range was around 500m. Including a firing divine protection would double that range, but this was different.

A god of war was about 6 times taller than a human. Scaling up accordingly, the targeting spell provided a range of 12km, but even for a god of war, the effective range was only around 1500m due to the limitations of human vision.

To use multiple targeting spells and hit a moving target 20km away would require...

“I’ll just have to do it.”

There was no waver or tension in Naomasa’s voice.

It was her usual plain and disinterested tone.

So Asama nodded. She looked forward and saw Toori look back and give her a thumbs up. She just about smiled back, but...

...Th-that was meant for Masa, wasn’t it? Yes, it must have been.

Asama suppressed a mix of emotions in her mouth and released the safeties on the spells.

She was aware her eyebrows were raised as she spoke.

“Go ahead.”

The Suzaku immediately fired.

Its target was flying counterclockwise from the western sky and into the southwest.

“The Shirasagi Castle’s 1st unit. ...I should go for the central ship.”

The bullet Naomasa used was so large that only one fit in the magazine. It was special ordered.

“The engine division’s special-made high-speed divine protection physical shell. This should punch through something like the Shirasagi.”

She fired it.

Blaring alarms filled the seemingly empty bridge of the Shirasagi Castle. The navigator’s voice turned back toward Takigawa.

“Enemy shell incoming! It’s a high-speed one! And its course will take advantage of our relative speed!”

“Can they hit us with a sniper shot at this range!?”

An *insha kotob* appeared on the floor in lieu of answering Takigawa’s question. It displayed the predicted course of the enemy shell. The shell flew in a shallow arc, and...

“It’s headed for the base of the bridge on the front port side! We can evade it with a somewhat shallow turn to starboard!”

“If we do that, what happens to the ships behind us!?”

On Takigawa’s command, the predicted ballistic path was drawn further.

“The 2nd accompanying ship will be hit! It will be knocked off course and collide with the others behind it!”

“Then we have only one option!” Takigawa raised her right hand and her voice. “Full speed ahead! Focus the defense barriers on the front port side!!”

The high-speed shell slammed into the Shirasagi Castle’s central ship on the

front port side.

The Shirasagi had opened several layers of defense barriers, so...

“...Endure it!!”

The sound of collapse rang through the sky. The barriers were stacked up thick and wide, but the shell’s impact caused them to bow. Hundreds of them bent at once like a single panel.

And they broke.

But more than just one layer was destroyed.

A crater-like hole opened in the center of the overlapping barriers and the hole quickly spread through the rest.

The impact produced an explosion of white water vapor and accelerated the speed of the collapse.

Countless sounds much like shattering glass shook the air and formed a single destructive noise. The shell tried to pass through it all.

“Will it make it!?”

But then more defense barriers appeared.

They should not have been there. The Shirasagi Castle’s central ship had already used all of its barriers against the high-speed shell. So what had produced these new ones that appeared and were shattered?

“The accompanying ships!”

The 1st and 2nd accompanying ships lined up alongside the Shirasagi Castle and supported its barrier.

This new power added thickness to the shattering shield, but that was quickly shattered too.

The piercing momentum carried light and noise with it. But...

“...It was diverted!!”

Once the navigator determined that, most of the defense barriers exploded. In their place, the Shirasagi and its accompanying ships flew forward.

They were unharmed.

After facing what they could call the Ariake's main cannon, Takigawa's unit gave a roar.

"We endured it...!!"

A moment later, light appeared. It was on the port side of the Shirasagi Castle's central ship. Something had flown in from the side and hit the secondary cannons at the base of the bridge.

The Shirasagi castle shook from the impact.

A tremor ran through the ship and alarms warned of damage.

From the bridge of the Shirasagi Castle's central ship, explosive flames were clearly visible down below to port.

The navigator could be heard running across the floor to check.

"We were hit!?"

It was not just one shell. The impacts continued as the navigator viewed the trajectory of the enemy shells. The source of the shells was displayed on an *insha kotob*.

"They are not coming from the Ariake's southwest corner! They are coming from the center of the Ariake's west edge!"

The center of the long edge was the most distant point from the Shirasagi Castle's path. Some light-enhanced footage showed someone standing there. The enemy was aiming a long cannon their way.

"It's Tachibana Gin!"

Gin held a single long cannon with her giant prosthetic arm.

The large Arcabuz Cruz was one of the pair known as Cuatro Cruz.

"It is only the right one, but I never thought its first firing after having it repaired would be an anti-ship shot."

Cuatro Cruz was meant for attacking a castle.

“So it should work just fine against a warship.”

Gin expressionlessly fired the large cannon again and again. The ether shards of the spell gunpowder scattered from the sides of the cross shape’s short axis along with the ejected paper wrapping for the shell. And each time that light scattered, she saw the light of a hit in the distant sky.

...It’s actually hitting.

It helped that the target warship was long front to back and she was aiming from the side, but the biggest factor was Branch and Leaf Connection opened in the sky and the firing spell using that information.

When Cuatro Cruz had been repaired, she had had a Far Eastern management system placed atop the existing Catholic one. That allowed it to receive backup from Musashi and the Asama Shrine, so it now had the data processing support of Branch and Leaf Connection.

“What do you think of this shellfire that immediately received the 6th Special Duty Officer’s firing data?”

The 6th Special Duty Officer’s sniper shot had actually been the final measurement.

That had given them the accurate distance to the enemy, the weather conditions, and information on the enemy’s defense equipment. And to draw all that data out of a single shot had required...

...Excellent sniping ability.

Jizuri Suzaku was incredibly precise. That was partially due to being a heavy god of war and due to working in the engine division, but its joints and frame must have been well taken care of.

Using the word “dangerous” to judge enemy and ally alike was just a part of Gin’s personality, so there was no helping it.

“Oh...I’m going to burn out the barrel.”

Gin checked Cuatro Cruz’s control screen on its sign frame and stopped firing.

Muneshige then ran over from the southwest corner. He carried 3 spare magazines on each shoulder.

“Huh? Are you done already, Gin?”

“...If you wish to see more, Master Muneshige, then I shall continue.”

Gin took one of the magazines and swapped it out for the old one. She slammed the first shell into the chamber and immediately fired. After a moment, fire burned on the Shirasagi Castle as it circled through the distant southern sky.

Muneshige sat next to her, raised one knee, and watched hits to the Shirasagi Castle.

“Ohh. ...Shooting a white heron is exactly the elegant way of breaking in a new gun I would expect from you.”

“Well, I am the daughter of a military family.”

“True enough. I suppose *hunting* a white heron suits you better than just *shooting* one.”

Just as he said that, flames erupted in the southwestern sky.

A few of the Shirasagi Castle’s port-side secondary cannons had exploded.

After watching that, Gin breathed a small sigh toward the floor. And then she looked awkwardly away from him.

“Master Muneshige, you made me overheat the barrel.”

The Shirasagi Castle’s central ship had received minor damage. Once that was known, Musashi’s main group was given new instructions.

Novice: “God of war sniper unit, use Naomasa-kun and Tachibana-kun’s data to begin sniper fire on the Shirasagi Castle’s 1st and 2nd units!”

“Judge,” replied the heavy gods of war of the sniper unit as they stood up.

Shells flew back and forth, but the Ariake and Musashi’s defense barriers moved through the air to keep the number of hits to a minimum.

But...

Wise Sister: “Oh, dear. The Shirasagi Castle isn’t falling back, is it? Are they being stubborn?”

That was not it. A divine transmission arrived from Suzu in the Musashi below.

Bell: “They’re...coming closer...!!”

Silver Wolf: “Judge! If they fall back here, it’ll just give us more time to block their shells. ...So they’re moving closer to increase the density and accuracy of their shellfire.”

Sticky King: “An exchange of blows, is it!? How exciting!”

But everyone saw the Shirasagi Castle rotate on its axis as it approached.

It was tilting toward the inner corner. By rolling on its side, it lowered the area for shell hits, and...

Musashi: “Everyone! Evacuate immediately! Over.”

All of the Shirasagi Castle’s cannons were pointed straight up from the ship. And thus toward the Ariake.

Musashi: “The enemy is going to fire all of its cannons! Over.”

The Ariake was pummeled.

All of the enemy’s cannons were fired at close range. While flying in a large circle, the enemy had only been able to use the cannons on its port side, but that had changed.

The armor panels on the upper surface were blown away like a summer rainstorm and the white fragments flew high to decorate the night. The shellfire swept across the Ariake like a gust of wind blowing away those fragments, but it did not stop there.

The primary armor burst and the shells reached the secondary and tertiary armor.

The cannon fire destroyed the Ariake as if to celebrate everything the enemy had accomplished thus far.

Branch and Leaf Connection opened to its full range around the Ariake and the Ariake and Musashi's defense barriers worked to block the shells.

But it was not enough.

The shellfire had increased twofold and was more powerful due to the closer range. Also, the Shirasagi Castle split up further to distribute its aim.

The 1st and 2nd units had been circling through the sky, but now each of those units split into 2 as well.

There were now 4 units. And they did not simply fly in 4 circles. Half of them lowered their speed at a distance, briefly stopped, and then moved backwards for a reverse circle.

Double reverse rotations of concentrated cannon fire shook the night sky with the Ariake's destruction.

"The Shirasagi Castle has no especially powerful cannons."

Takigawa spoke quietly as alarms blared and the smell of smoke seeped into the Shirasagi Castle's bridge.

"But it has high speed and mobility, so proper control of its thrusters lets you pull off movements that would be impossible for other ships. And that's what lets us fire every last one of our cannons at once, which shouldn't be possible for a warship. We can't do this for long, but how long can the Ariake last?"

Takigawa looked overhead.

The ceiling displayed footage of the Ariake viewed from a shallow elevated angle.

The colossal white surface was covered in sparks and scattering fragments. But the enemy was still focusing their defense barriers in a few places and sniper shells were being launched from there. The navigator locked onto those and sent Takigawa the information.

"The enemy sniper unit is using a direct line from the center of the Ariake! Should we target them there!?"

“Don’t bother! We’ve already torn up their secondary armor! And we have to be through the tertiary in places! Calculate out where and concentrate our fire there! Assume we’ll be hit some! This is a battle!”

Takigawa swung her right arm as she barked her orders and she only later noticed the movement of her arm.

She smiled a little, grabbed the Garuda standing on her hand, and tossed it away.

“I’m getting fired up.”

She crossed her arms and looked out the window with a smile on her lips. There she saw the Shirasagi Castle erupting with red flames and black smoke.

“How much longer will we last?”

“Shaja! ...I would say 10 minutes.”

“Then use up all our ammo within 5 minutes. ...Let’s dig down into the Ariake and settle this in those 5 minutes!”

Just as everyone nodded at her command, the navigator spoke up while viewing the situation outside.

“Eh...?”

No one asked why he sounded so confused.

They could see the answer overhead.

White fog was enveloping the Ariake.

“The stealth defense barrier!? ...Are they giving up on their gravity barrier so they can flee!?”

The interior of the Ariake was filled with the sound of rain.

The ceiling armor had been shot through down to the tertiary armor in places, so the outside air and metal shells could get inside.

Of course, those things were not just let inside. The armor was 3 meters thick and there were buffering spaces in between layers. But the shells would bounce

off the inner wall of the hole, shatter, and send fragments ricocheting down into the open hole.

To stop those, defense barriers were opened on the ceiling, but sometimes a hit was powerful enough to shake the walls.

Also, water or the glowing smoke of ether fuel would burst from the ceiling and fall down as rain.

Someone stood within the blaring alarms and indoor rain.

Masazumi rode the ascending lift while ignoring the bit of rain hitting her.

She waited for the others to reach her.

They were Musashi's main force. The officers.

Of course, there were other people there as well. The other lifts carried the sniper gods of war and the general students who had been making repairs up above.

Masazumi spoke to them all.

"Well done fighting up there. We damaged the Shirasagi Castle and pulled it toward the Ariake, bringing it within range."

Masazumi raised her right forearm as rain drops hit the hand.

And she said more while looking across the group before her.

"Starting now, Musashi Ariadust Academy will settle this with the Shirasagi Castle within 5 minutes."

The command to continue firing was given on the Shirasagi Castle's bridge.

The Ariake had hidden behind its stealth defense barrier, but that did not defend it from the shells. So even if the space looked empty, they could continue to fire and perceive the Ariake's location based on where the shells disappeared and where the falling fragments appeared.

Takigawa had them continue their concentrated fire on the predicted vital points on the surface of the Ariake's upper surface.

“The top should break apart soon!”

The Musashi was docked at the land port within. If the Ariake’s upper armor shattered, the Musashi would be a sitting duck.

In fact, that might have already happened.

But there was no point in celebrating a prediction. They would continue firing every last one of their shells to be absolutely certain.

“Accompanying ships! Keep your distance and have your crew evacuate! Prepare to ram the Ariake!”

Even if the Ariake canceled its stealth and switched to the gravity defense barriers, the damaged upper armor would never survive having 4 ships ram it.

With any luck, the shellfire or the accompanying ships would reach the Musashi within. Or they could at least supply the damage needed to destroy the Ariake’s upper surface. The former would be best, but the latter was not a problem. If the upper surface collapsed, the Ariake could no longer protect the Musashi.

The *insha kotob* by Takigawa’s hands showed her the estimated damage to the Ariake.

...In about another 2 minutes, a 30 meter section of the tertiary armor will have been torn away.

That was thanks to firing on several points instead of concentrating everything on just the one point. The bent frame was tearing away the armor panels from within.

That meant their attacks would be able to reach the Musashi in another 2 minutes.

But just as she thought that, light suddenly appeared in the space below them.

It was a giant rectangular mass measuring several kilometers. And that light fell into the sky.

“Is that...?”

“It’s the ether pool used to launch the Musashi from the bottom of the Ariake!”

With a length and width just a little shorter than the Ariake’s, the cascade of light was dumped into the air.

The second-in-command shouted what was going to happen next.

“The Musashi is leaving the Ariake from below!”

Chapter 25: Right Holder in the Heavens

CHAPTER 25

"Right Holder in the Heavens"



What was everything looking at?
Where was everything looking to?
Will that be the deciding factor?

Point Allocation (Conclusion)

What was everything looking at?

Where was everything looking to?

Will that be the deciding factor?

Point Allocation (Conclusion)

Takigawa looked down at the glowing sky.

...The Musashi is leaving!?

A diagram appeared on the *insha kotob* displayed on the ceiling of the seemingly empty bridge. It showed a line drawing of the Ariake with the Musashi leaving it from the bottom.

That was how the Ariake opened up from below.

The Musashi could leave the Ariake from the bottom or the top, but the top was under attack at the moment. And by leaving from the bottom as before, they could use the Ariake as a shield, making it safer.

But, thought Takigawa. Why would the Musashi leave now?

“Takigawa-sama! The last time the Musashi was ejected from the bottom, it took about a minute for it to shift into gravitational cruising!”

“And what happens if they do that here?”

“Shaja! The Ariake is currently pointed toward...”

They had been estimating the Ariake’s position inside its stealth barrier based on the reactions to their shellfire. It had turned, so now its bow faced to the southwest. And something flew far in the distance in that direction.

“...the Azuchi! If they use their gravitational cruising, the Musashi will reach the Azuchi approximately 17 minutes after passing through Houjou territory!”

And a tremendous movement of wind occurred below.

Takigawa knew what was happening and the divine transmission report confirmed it.

“The Musashi has appeared from the bottom of the Ariake! The bottom of the

hull has been visually confirmed! It is making a rapid descent!”

Takigawa made her decision based on that voice.

“Shirasagi, maintain ship attitude while moving to the front of the Ariake! Accompanying ships, circle behind the Musashi!”

It was possible the Musashi was preparing to fire its main cannon the instant it appeared, so she would take a higher position and destroy the Musashi’s bow with shellfire. If the Musashi used the Ariake as an umbrella, the Ariake would also get in the way of its own main cannon.

...We’ll be safe if we take a higher position!

“Fire as soon as you are in position! Concentrate fire on the Musashi’s bow and make sure they can’t use their gravitational cruising!”

As the Musashi descended, Suzu controlled the fall from the bridge.

Their current plan required close cooperation with the Ariake. But...

Bell: “A-are you...sure y-you want...m-me in control?”

Ariake: “Excuse me, Mukai-sama of Musashi. This is ‘Ariake’. For the past few days, I have copied over the 3D models you have created, and you made me, the Ariake, look very cute. ...And that is a statistical evaluation, not a personal emotion. Automatons have no emotions. Based on that, I have determined it would be safest for you to take primary control of our joint effort while ‘Musashi’ and I provide support. Over.”

Musashi: “As this ship’s overall captain, I agree. Over.”

Does that mean they do want it? It does, doesn’t it? I hope it does, thought Suzu as she sweated nervously and got to work. She expanded the models of the Ariake and the Musashi to make them a little bigger.

“Then...here goes...?”

While the Shirasagi Castle moved to the sky in front of the Ariake, Takigawa saw the Musashi’s silhouette appear down below.

When it appeared from the stealth barrier, the cross section was filled with ether light. It looked the same as an object being ejected from a phase space.

And at the moment, the Musashi was tilted somewhat as it fell. The stern had fallen lower than the rest and it was moving back a bit as it fell.

But this was not an uncontrolled fall. When expanding the gravitational cruising system, a backwards descent brought wind in from behind to rapidly expand the wings and other parts.

Takigawa had a thought as she watched the Musashi's diagonal fall.

...That's convenient.

The accompanying ships were currently circling behind the Musashi. A collision with the slanted ship would mean a diagonal hit to the upper surface.

So that left only one thing:

"Secure a line of fire while taking the Ariake into consideration!
Accompanying ships, begin accelerating once you're in position!"

Just as she swung her arm and gave her orders, color blossomed in the distant darkness of the northeastern sky.

That color was red.

"The 1st and 2nd accompanying ships were hit!!"

Before she could wonder what this was about, 2 more fiery explosions erupted in the northeastern sky.

The brief flash of light illuminated the enemy's method enough for a ninja like Takigawa to see.

"Did they have the Ariake's transport ships ram our ships!?"

Takigawa realized why the Ariake had put up its stealth barrier. It had not been to hide itself.

...It was to hide the acceleration meant to ram us with the transport ships!

That meant the enemy had predicted she would send those ships behind

them.

The rumble of the explosions reached her from the distant sky.

She heard the long, low noise of 2 more accompanying ships taken out by transport ship collisions.

Just as Takigawa realized the enemy had predicted her strategy...

“Enemy craft incoming!! It’s a Satomi god of war! The Righteousness!!”

It only took an instant.

The god of war targeted the port ship as it moved into position alongside the central one.

The god of war’s high-speed charge caught them by surprise, so they did not have time to fire their secondary cannons. Or more accurately, it had flown right up from behind the port ship’s bridge, taking advantage of that bridge’s blind spot there.

Even if the sensors picked it up, their response was delayed by the lack of visual confirmation. So as they watched...

“Port ship, defend your bridge!”

Their defense barriers would stop this. After all...

“It’s using close-range attack equipment!”

Yoshiyasu did not hesitate.

...One strike!

The Shirasagi Castle’s port ship flew on its side. Yoshiyasu bet everything on the instant she passed by just below its bridge.

She was so focused her speed seemed to drop and she saw ether fog between herself and the bridge.

That would become a defense barrier.

If she had time, her best bet would be to destroy the barrier and cling to the bridge.

But she did not have time. Her speed would take her by too fast. Approaching the bridge with this speed would only slam her against the bridge and the defense barriers surrounding it.

“In that case...”

Yoshiyasu swung her sword in a horizontal slash.

She extended her arm and wrist to their limit and moved with extremely high speed before the defense barrier could take form.

“...!”

If the barrier hit her, it would take off her arm. But the blade sliced horizontally through the wind and her arm was stable.

She had only one more thing to do.

She threw the sword she held.

She pushed on the hilt with her fingers as if tossing it toward the port ship’s bridge.

“Go!!”

It went.

Takigawa and the others saw the blue-hilted sword stab into the bridge of the port ship which was trying to rejoin them.

The bridge was wider than the god of war’s sword was long, so even the steel-slicing sword’s guard slammed into the bridge.

“Port ship!”

As Takigawa called out to it, the port ship shuddered and all light vanished from around the bridge.

It was a direct hit.

The reddish emergency lights activated later, but it was too late. The entire port ship wobbled on its main axis. It could fly, but the bridge’s control system

had to be mostly unusable.

Until the bridge could recover, each section of the port ship would have to operate independently.

“That’s like flying blind and deaf!”

The Satomi god of war had already passed by and began to descend in a parabolic arc.

It was clearly moving away from them and regrouping with the accelerating Musashi.

...Not bad.

I can’t let it end like this, thought Takigawa.

The accompanying ships had been held off.

The port ship had lost its command ability and Takigawa’s own central ship had been hit on the port side.

Fortunately, the starboard ship was unharmed. So...

“Port ship! If you can hear this divine transmission, focus your fire downward! Only think about cutting off the Musashi’s route!”

“Shaja!”

She received a staticky but definite response.

The cannons were still functional, even if they had no targeting support from command.

“Port ship here! We will continue firing all shells straight down!”

That was good enough. That just left the other two ships to fire on the Musashi from behind the invisible umbrella of the Ariake.

But, suddenly thought Takigawa. *Isn’t this odd?*

“...?”

Something bothered her.

Takigawa questioned it.

Why had the Satomi god of war attacked the port ship just now?

...No, I can explain that from a tactical standpoint.

It was to prevent the Shirasagi from pursuing the Musashi when it accelerated after the Azuchi Castle.

The central ship had already been damaged, so if the port ship lost its command ability, only the starboard ship could pursue.

The Musashi's acceleration would be more than enough to lose the starboard ship. After all, most of the Shirasagi Castle's thrust was in the central ship.

...No, that isn't it.

It did not fit.

If the only goal was to keep the Shirasagi Castle from pursuing them, the damage to the central ship had already accomplished that. Both the port and starboard ships lacked the thrust of the central ship.

So why had the enemy attacked the port ship?

"To keep us here...?"

It was true they would have to cover for the port ship that had lost its command ability. That made it difficult for the central and starboard ships to leave this airspace.

They could not move.

But that was what bothered her.

The Shirasagi Castle could no longer pursue the Musashi. So why would they feel the need to keep them here?

...Don't tell me...!

"Central ship, port ship, fire horizontally toward the Ariake! ...A transport ship is coming from the Ariake's outer edge!!"

A ship belonging to the Ariake drew a straight, high-speed line.

To increase its ramming power, damaged armor panels from the upper surface had been piled up on the flat ship's front end.

But its flight had been predicted.

The Shirasagi Castle's main cannons all fired at once.

"...!!"

The flat ship's port bilge was destroyed.

The ship was moving fast and the impact easily knocked it off course.

The transport ship hopped up to port and the flat ship's uniquely structured bow rose up in the air. The bow was quickly lifted up as if to show off the bottom of the hull, but it still moved forward.

"Fire...!"

The order was given on the Shirasagi Castle and the transport ship was torn to pieces while still standing upright.

It was destroyed.

The metal ship was rendered entirely unrecognizable.

It fell. The ropes holding on the stacked materials came undone and the three-dimensional objects were tossed out into the sky.

From there, it could only fall. It would probably explode and be utterly obliterated on the way down.

It was not even worth watching the rest.

But at that point, the residents of the Shirasagi Castle looked down.

They saw a giant box there.

The Ariake had removed its stealth barrier.

But that was not all.

The Ariake had changed form.

The damaged and broken upper armor had folded up and spread to either side like wings, exposing the interior.

The top had opened.

...What are they doing!?

Takigawa looked down inside the Ariake.

She saw a metal box that seemed to continue forever.

But why had they removed the stealth and opened the top now?

“They must have already released the Musashi from the bottom...”

That thought reminded her of the term “diversion”. By exposing the defenseless interior, were they trying to redirect the Shirasagi Castle’s attacks toward the Musashi? Or were they revealing their physical form to hide the Musashi below them?

But Takigawa realized something else: she could see the Musashi.

“...Huh?”

That was strange.

The Musashi was currently falling diagonally below the Ariake in preparation for gravitational acceleration.

In that case, why could she see it?

...Is the bottom hatch still open!?

The Musashi dock inside the Ariake still had its bottom open.

That revealed the Musashi below. And the Musashi had its stern tilted downward.

What did this layout mean?

Takigawa finally grasped the whole picture.

The Musashi was not preparing to accelerate. And the Ariake had no intention of protecting the Musashi. The Musashi was merely aiming her way while the Shirasagi Castle was held in place.

“Take evasive action!! The Musashi is going to fire its main cannon through the Ariake!!”

On the bridge in front of Musashi Ariadust Academy, Masazumi stood on the greatly slanted wooden floor and looked at something.

The central ships were positioned slightly lower and the 6 port and starboard ships used their gravitational control to create the great virtual cannon barrel that passed below the bridge shape of Musashino's bridge. That grand form was nearly complete.

The sign frame next to her showed "Musashi" drawing a large and small sword from the air atop the bridge-shaped ship's bridge.

Of the 2 swords, she raised the short sword in front of her face.

"Musashi Small Kanesada...main barrel creation complete. Over."

The barrel was supported by the thrusters opened on the inner sides of the ships. It extended out in front of the tilted Musashi. And on the other side from the one displaying "Musashi", a sign frame appeared to display "Ariake". Her slender face nodded.

"The Ariake will now descend. Over."

While combined with Righteousness, Yoshiyasu saw the movement west of Edo in the sky above the Musashino.

A sword was being drawn toward the night sky.

The Ariake descended so that the diagonal Musashi pierced through it.

...It's downright gigantic!

Due to descending with her speed intact, Yoshiyasu was currently a dozen or so kilometers away from the battle. But she could clearly see the 8 white ships draw their sword.

They moved.

First, the long bows of 1st ships Asakusa and Shinagawa protruded from the portion of the dock where the 3rd port and starboard ships should have been.

Next, Musashino appeared from the central dock it was meant for while Small

Kanesada's barrel rose diagonally overhead.

With the roar of the night sky being pierced, the two giant ships crossed paths.

The cannon barrel was pointed toward 3 white warships.

That was the Shirasagi Castle.

The Musashi was pointed straight toward those ships which were spewing flames and erupting with explosions.

But Yoshiyasu could tell the Shirasagi Castle had not given up on the battle.

"Are they going to fight back!?"

Thanks to the port ship, the Shirasagi Castle could not move. They could always surrender, but Takigawa chose not to.

She targeted their enemy from dead ahead.

Yoshiyasu could see the central and starboard ship angling down the barrels that had fired horizontally to destroy the transport ship.

The Shirasagi Castle's cannons targeted a certain point to strike back against the Musashi: Musashi's bridge.

Which had greater control: the large ship or the damaged ship?

They had both drawn their weapons and they were swinging them to see who could reach the other sooner.

But...

...The Shirasagi Castle has the advantage!

Yoshiyasu's reasoning was immediately proven correct.

The Shirasagi Castle had been pointed horizontally, but it rotated down toward the Musashi all at once.

"They rotated the entire ship!"

Instead of altering the angle of the cannons like normal, they spun the entire ship.

And that high-speed rotation accelerated the sweeping motion of their main

cannons.

The enemy was going to target Musashino's bridge before the Musashi could control its tilt.

The 2 colossal ships were being commanded by Suzu on Musashino's bridge.

She touched the 2 models she had made somewhat larger.

"Slowly, slowly...but quickly..."

Novice: "Ohh! That's Mukai-kun for you! When it comes to detailed movements of giant structures, you need someone with your delicate hands! In other words-..."

Bell: "P-please be...quiet..."

Mal-Ga: "I couldn't agree more."

Novice: "Dammit! What did I even doooo!?"

Four Eyes: "They're saying you're loud and annoying."

Suzu smiled a bit at that exchange while feeling the models in her hands moving toward completion. *I can do this*, she awkwardly thought, but something else had her attention more.

The Shirasagi Castle existed in front of the Musashi as a model and it had finished aiming its main cannons toward the Musashi.

...Make it in time!

Then the model Shirasagi Castle shook.

It had fired toward the Musashi.

This will hit, thought Takigawa.

Please hit, she also thought.

Musashi's Kanesada main cannon was its greatest means of attack, but it had a flaw.

This was only her prediction, but...

“You can’t put up enough defense barriers, can you!?”

That proved accurate.

They were needed to power the Kanesada as it fired and to preserve the barrel. The data from when it had been fired at Novgorod supported that.

The cannons roared. It was a volley of the Shirasagi Castle’s main cannons. The shells were already flying toward their targeted location. There was just a delay before the sound arrived.

I’m really focused, thought Takigawa. She also raised her right hand and prepared to give the evacuation order.

These shells would shatter Musashino’s bridge, but the Shirasagi Castle was near its limit too. So...

“Prepare to withdra-...”

But she trailed off.

She was watching the Shirasagi Castle’s volley. The ceiling *insha kotob* used red lines to display their trajectories over the actual footage. But...

“They missed...!?”

They had veered to the right. Some of the shells scraped at the Ariake’s interior and scattered into the sky, but most of them also missed the Ariake and scattered into the night sky.

...Wait...

What does this mean? wondered Takigawa, eyes wide.

But the answer reached her as a sound.

It came from the starboard side of the ship, which pointed down. The ship was standing up on its nose more than lying on its side and she heard a sound from down below.

It was an explosion. And it was the largescale blast of some large structure.

She realized what was causing the reverberation.

“The transport ship we shot down earlier!?”

It had exploded below the Shirasagi Castle and shaken their long-range shots.

Suzu breathed into her lungs.

...It...made it!

As the transport ship had fallen, its inertia had taken it below the Shirasagi Castle.

It was lucky the materials on the bow had acted as a weight. Without that, it would have stalled before arriving below the Shirasagi Castle.



The explosion had been triggered remotely. It was a lot like the tactic Tres España had used against them in the Armada Battle. If it hit, that was great. But if not, it could rob the enemy of a chance to fire.

Naomasa had been in charge of the remote-control detonation, so...

Bell: “P-perfect...timing.”

Smoking Girl: “Only because Asama-chi used that spell system to calculate its falling trajectory. It wouldn’t have gone that well if it was just me.”

Hori-ko: “It would seem we should always turn to Asama-sama when we need someone to sink a ship.”

Asama: “Th-that isn’t what she meant, Horizon!”

But the explosion had “hit”.

The shockwave shook the air for a dozen or so kilometers. At close range, the powerful pressure could send someone flying. Even though it had been falling, the shockwave from a few kilometers away had still reached and shaken the Shirasagi Castle.

The enemy had fired on them.

But they had not been hit. Well, the Ariake had been hit some, but...

“This will...work.”

Suzu had the Musashi perfectly in position, so she nodded and spoke.

“Do it...Masazu...mi...!”

Masazumi brushed back her rain-wet hair, spread that hand, and thrust it forward.

In the sky straight ahead, she saw the Shirasagi Castle firing its secondary cannons before it could aim its main cannons again.

The shells scraped through the surrounding air and some of them hit the Ariake’s interior.

But Masazumi ignored those as she raised her voice.

“Small Kanesada...fire!!”

This produced a blast of pressure.

Kanesada's shell was a compressed form of the gravitational defense barriers. In Small Kanesada's case, the compression was set somewhat weaker and the shell would scatter at a designated distance.

The resultant scatter shot provided an impact across a surface.

First, the shockwave tore through the air and burst at a point about 3km in front of the Musashi and Ariake. It then spread out in a fan-shape to impact the air as a surface with a diameter of about 5km.

Its target was the Shirasagi Castle.

That 3-hull ship was long front to back and it was currently tilted on its side. It used that orientation to point the bottom of its hull toward the Musashi to ride the impact.

It pulled it off in time.

But only the central and starboard ships did. Having lost its command ability, the port ship initially floated up a bit as if being gently scooped up, but it was soon hit hard.

The result was plain as day.

When the shockwave hit, the entire ship was destroyed.

The armor panels dug into the frame and were bent until the entire ship was crushed in.

The internal frame jutted out from the between the armor panels and the foundation of the bridge bent from the powerful impact.

The great sword previously stabbed into the bridge had its hilt destroyed as it rose up and bisected the bottom of the bridge.

The central and starboard ships were the same.

The keel running down the center of the hull was lifted up and dented in enough to reveal its shape. As it was pushed up, the frame on either side jutted

out from the port and starboard sides of the deck.

The ship grew narrower like it was being squeezed and the reinforcing frames on either side used their superior strength to punch through the Shirasagi Castle like skewers.

The destruction produced sounds of creaking and breaking metal.

And it did not end there.

The thrusters were a problem. After the sudden impact, the main thrusters of the acceleration system flashed with light as if coughing from insufficient power. Soon thereafter, they were taken out by the shockwave.

A destructive wind passed from the thrusters into the ship, destroying the thrusters and then causing primarily the stern to burst.

The explosion pushed the ships forward and the impact to the bottom of the hull helped them along. They seemed to slip free of a crushing hand as the wave of destruction tilted them backwards and broke them.

The hulls did not split. The Shirasagi simply broke starting from the back of the bridge's base.

The port ship had already lost power, so it took relatively little damage overall. By the time the shockwave had passed, the next wave of destruction reached the 3 ships.

The passage of the largescale impact had created a massive vacuum.

A 5km hole was created in the sky.

And the 3 powerless ships fell right into it.

There was no sound. The only thing there was ether light smoke.

As the 3 ships fell into the emptiness as if tumbling from a waterfall, something assaulted them.

Air rushed into the vacuum.

As it worked to fill the vacuum from all directions, the air grabbed at the ships within and slammed against each other. Wind collided with wind, created a great roar, and formed a 5km field of fog as the cold and warm air of different

altitudes mixed together.

Within it all, the Shirasagi was pummeled by the air and lost all control.

The 3 ships collided.

The starboard ship's bow stabbed into the central ship's stern, the central ship was swung around from the push on its rear, and the port ship was hit by the central ship's tackle.

The compressed port ship could not endure the blow.

Spell gunpowder and shell loading mechanisms were destroyed in the armory at the center of the bow, triggering an explosion.

The ship blew up.

That second impact hit the central ship as a counterattack and deepened the bend of that ship.

The central ship's hull split and the damage did not stop there. Having the starboard ship piercing and pushing on it from behind did not help.

The central ship ruptured, starting from the rear of the bridge.

The central ship's bow collided with the right side of the starboard ship's stern, knocking them away from each other.

Then the rain fell.

Everyone was still moving with creaking and roaring noises, but the rain produced by the collision of air fell across the vast area of sky.

The Shirasagi was soaked and washed by the downpour, but the only one that could remain airborne was the transformed and badly bent starboard ship.

The Shirasagi Castle was sinking.

Utter chaos filled the central ship's bridge.

Alarms rang and emergency light *insha kotobs* flashed in and out while Takigawa quickly ordered everyone to abandon ship.

...They really did it this time!

She clenched her teeth and stared into the sky. The Musashi was already located above them as it left the Ariake.

How much different would she have felt if she could look down at it? But she now had to look up into the heavens to see it.

It almost felt like they were entirely ignoring her.

Dammit, thought Takigawa.

“Since when?”

Since when had they planned out this victory?

“Since when...!?”

She recalled the enemy’s movements atop the Ariake.

The general unit had continued to observe the Shirasagi Castle without fleeing even with the shellfire hitting all around them.

It had looked like Musashi’s main force was wasting time with silly things, but they had not withdrawn and they had responded with perfect coordination.

Maintaining morale on the battlefield was difficult like that. Shibata, Takigawa, and others like them could only accomplish that once they put everyone at ease by standing out front as the main players of the historical battles.

The enemy’s general unit had not been under anyone’s protection and they had been acting on their own discretion.

“That would mean...”

Takigawa felt a sudden chill.

Without even realizing it, was Musashi building up a system different from the one that ran the modern battlefield?

Instead of having the main players lead the battlefield and adapt their strategies on the fly like P.A. Oda did...

...Their system has the normal people spontaneously support the battlefield...

“———”

Impossible, thought Takigawa.

War was frightening and loathsome. It brought loss and destruction while leaving nothing behind.

You wielded power to avoid the loss of defeat by defeating your opponent and forcing the loss onto them.

What other option was there?

But based on the enemy's actions...

"Dammit...!"

She did not understand.

What was the difference between P.A. Oda and them? She could sense something there, but she could not figure out what.

Was this a job for one of P.A. Oda's best ninjas?

She clenched her teeth, inhaled, and stared at the Musashi where it flew high in the sky.

The Shirasagi exploded. She felt the impact through the floor and heard the voices of the others urging her to evacuate.

"Musashi...! If you are something new and incomprehensible, then we will test you using the good, old ways! Do everything you can to make sure you don't lose anything. The trends created by those efforts," she roared, "are the qualifications of a victor! We will see whether or not you have those!"

Masazumi saw a large vermilion flower blossom far below.

...So the world is going to move somewhat.

This was not just about Kantou and the nearby regions. The sinking of the Shirasagi Castle would have great meaning for Mouri as well. The Shirasagi Castle was originally a Setouchi castle, so it could have rushed over to assist Hashiba.

After going this far, Musashi could definitely claim Mouri owed them a debt of gratitude.

In Kantou and the nearby regions, P.A. Oda's powerful observer was gone.

"That eliminates a major enemy power in the fight to liberate Edo."

Marube-ya: "But, Masazumi, you destroyed the Ariake way too much. Compare the Shirasagi Castle's construction costs to the Ariake's repair costs, and the loss isn't much different."

Vice President: "Yeah, the Ariake is pretty big... But looking at the political meaning and the future favors we can ask for, we'll more than make up for that cost."

"That's true," said the merchant, so she was probably already at work on it.

Then something warm was draped over her head.

She looked back to find the crossdresser.

"This is the summer uniform I was wearing before crossdressing. ...You're gonna catch cold."

"If it wasn't for the weird pillow, I'd probably accept it..."

"You'd prefer the pants?"

"I said I don't want it, idiot."

But, thought Masazumi. Before, he had placed a wig on her backwards to hide her face. Compared to that, her situation really had changed a lot.

Then Asama walked over.

"Toori-kun, you're wet from the rain too. Here's a towel. You too, Horizon, Mito, and Kimi. And I'll wash your clothes, Toori-kun, but you left some other clothes at my place when you stripped them off the other day, so you go warm up in the men's spring, put those on, and head back home."

"Eh? I can't keep these shrine maiden clothes?"

"Of course not," sighed Asama before the Aoi sister called her over so they could towel off Horizon's hair together. Horizon herself did not think too much about what it meant to be wet.

"I am an automaton, so I cannot catch cold..."

“Heh heh. But it will damage your hair and skin. And this isn’t normal rain. It’s the Ariake’s circulatory water, so it has filtering herbs inside. Let it dry like this, and it’ll leave some things behind.”

“I see,” nodded Horizon before letting them dry her off as they pleased.

“And now it’s all over for the time being.”

“Aeh? Whaddya mean ‘for the time being’, Seijun? You mean there’s gonna be more see-through clothing?”

“Huh?”

Masazumi looked down at her clothes and realized the water had left her summer uniform shirt see-through.

“Owah!” she shouted as she quickly covered herself with the idiot’s shirt.

“You were facing away from us, so it wasn’t really a problem,” said Mitotsudaira.

“Still...”

Masazumi cleared her throat once as Mitotsudaira took a towel from Asama and handed it to her.

“Umm, anyway, Aoi, about your question. I say ‘for the time being’ because we’re sure to be holding some negotiations via divine transmission soon. And about something rather troublesome for us.”

Once she said that, a large sign frame opened above the Musashi which had returned to its horizontal orientation.

The sign frame displayed “Ariake” who gave a quick bow before starting.

“Musashi Ariadust Academy Vice President Honda Masazumi-sama. ...A divine transmission has arrived for you.”

Here it is, thought Masazumi. She was ready for this, so she responded.

“Put it through.”

“Judge.” “Ariake” nodded. “Then I shall do so. ...It is from M.H.R.R. Vice President Hashiba Toukichirou-sama.”

In the southern Houjou land of southern Kantou, a giant ship traveled toward Mouri.

The 6-ship formation was the Azuchi Castle. Even at night, the black and red painted ship did not hide itself and simply used buffering spells to erase the rumbling of the air caused by its passage.

Someone in the circular bridge of the rear central ship had been tracking Takigawa's wellbeing this entire time.

It was Fukushima Masanori.

The bridge was staffed primarily by her upperclassmen who explained a great many things to her while she contacted the Hashiba forces stationed at Edo and arranged to have them raise the alert level in the Edo region and to send out rescue teams for the fallen Shirasagi Castle and accompanying ships.

"Have the accompanying ships activate their noncombatant signal lights and hang white cloths from the larger cannons. And then..."

While she gave instructions, the upperclassman in charge of the divine transmissions tapped her shoulder.

She looked back, bowed quickly, and took a *lernen figur* from the bitterly smiling upperclassman.

"Eh!? From Hashiba-sama!?"

Kiyo-Massive: "It's an emergency! Since this is guaranteed to influence the attack on Mouri, we have to demonstrate to the other nations that we can restrain the Musashi here."

"Thou mean..." Fukushima briefly fell speechless.

Llaf: "The world is moving in a big way... And the Ten Spears will have to get to work on our main task. But if Hashiba-sama is going to negotiate..."

Kiyo-Massive: "?"

After a moment of hesitation, Fukushima explained.

Llaf: "Hashiba-sama has trouble adlibbing."

Chapter 26: Realist on the Divine Transmission

CHAPTER 26

"Realist on the Divine Transmission"



Annoyingly enough
A sound argument
Is not the same thing as reality
Point Allocation (Yeah, that happens a lot)

Annoyingly enough

A sound argument

Is not the same thing as reality

Point Allocation (Yeah, that happens a lot)

In the northern sky of Oushuu, the Date flagship of the Aoba Castle and the Mogami flagship of the Yamagata Castle had been watching from a distant position in the sky. They had started to return home, but now they had stopped again.

Someone's long hair blew in the wind as she stood on the deck of the Aoba Castle with the forests of Oushuu below.

It was Masamune and she opened a sign frame.

One-Eyed Dragon: "Aunt, Hashiba has finally set out for Kantou."

Nine-Tailed Girl: "Do you have something to say? Or something to ask? If not, I don't need you to explain the situation."

One-Eyed Dragon: "Hashiba must stop Musashi. And Musashi will most likely be forced to stop. What will we do then?"

Nine-Tailed Girl: "Mogami will probably monitor P.A. Oda's other forces in Shinshuu while discussing the future trade route with Musashi since they will have plenty of spare time on their hands."

Masamune had said "we", but her aunt had readily ignored that part.

She was implicitly telling Masamune to do as she pleased. So...

One-Eyed Dragon: "Then Date will sell weapons to Musashi. And use that for trade negotiations."

Nine-Tailed Girl: "That sounds like a good idea. Date will be indebted to Matsudaira after the wars. You need to earn debts of gratitude as well as support them now."

Just as her aunt said that, someone else butted into the sign frame.

Katakura-kun: “Whoops! Excuse me for interrupting your conversation! It’s me! Me! You know who I am, right? Or do you not? Yes, I’m your all-important Vice President!”

Masamune broke the sign frame with a smile.

She then scooped up the falling fragments and lightly struck them to restart it. She immediately called up the divine chat with her aunt.

One-Eyed Dragon: “Sorry, aunt. There was a bit of an interruption.”

Nine-Tailed Girl: “Yes. Katakura, right? But Masamune. You know what that glasses boy wanted to say, don’t you? It got through to me.”

“Testament,” confirmed Masamune.

At that moment, she heard something from the forest below.

She heard birds and beasts.

A flock of birds sleeping in the depths of the night suddenly took flight and soared south. They squawked in alarm and screamed as some of them ran into each other or trees.

The beasts down below were the same. Starting with the quadrupeds such as deer, foxes, and tanuki...

“So the forest beasts, swamp residents, and stone creatures have started moving. In that case...”

As soon as Masamune looked into the sky, it appeared quite nearby.

It was a straight line at least 100 meters long, but it had 6 giant wings. It was made of ether and it glowed with a dull, dark blue light.

Masamune smiled toward it as it flew past and clearly looked over at her.

“The spirit dragons are on the move.”

Masamune watched the dragon shape pass by almost within arm’s reach as it quickly flew southwest.

And there was more than one. 3 and then 4 spirit dragons passed by.

However, the Aoba Castle triggered no alarms when they appeared and approached.

Nine-Tailed Girl: “Did the dragons stop by to visit? Dragons are children of a great spirit, so I suppose they would line up for the spirit-user known as the One-Eyed Dragon.”

One-Eyed Dragon: “They’re still looking down on me, so I don’t think that counts as lining up for me, aunt.”

“True,” said the fox with a laugh. And...

Nine-Tailed Girl: “There are two kinds of dragons: the Terrestrial Dragons which are beasts with physical form and the Celestial Dragons which are gods or spirits. But things can get confusing because when people hear the word ‘dragon’ they think of the Terrestrial Dragons in the outside world. And even then, usually the low-level ones that really are just beasts. Even you just think of them as something frightening, don’t you?”

One-Eyed Dragon: “I have heard there are some Terrestrial and Celestial Dragons in the outside world that can speak. And I’ve heard that Tres España got their help to develop the land there. Of course, relying too much on the dragons could lead to the return of the dragon supremacy that occurred during the Medieval Harmonic Divine States, so both sides are cautious about the other.”

Nine-Tailed Girl: “Due to that, the cooling that occurred afterwards, and the limited suitable land for them in the Far East, the number of Terrestrial and Celestial Dragons living in the Divine States dropped considerably. If they had been less arrogant at the time, they would not have become such recluses and the development of the outside world would have not have been delayed so long.”

One-Eyed Dragon: “Aunt, Oushuu contains a few areas of land that humans gave them as a form of atonement. It’s thanks to that land that I was born, so don’t view them so harshly.”

Nine-Tailed Girl: “My apologies.”

The fox laughed.

Nine-Tailed Girl: “Foxes and dragons have never got along very well. But putting humans between us as a meal and it works out pretty well. However...”

However...

Nine-Tailed Girl: “Are they on their way to west Kantou?”

One-Eyed Dragon: “Testament. That is one of the areas where dragons are allowed to live. It is an abandoned land with some ruins remaining. Some humans live with them there. Most likely, that group is on their way there to get or deliver some information. The Far Eastern dragons are generally distanced from worldly things, but even they must be focused on where the world is headed.”

Masamune looked to the south.

A white rectangle floated in the sky and a giant ship entered it from below.

Their presence in the sky meant something.

One-Eyed Dragon: “Musashi has proven that they can fight Hashiba. That forces Hashiba to get involved even as they continue their attack on Mouri. Which means...”

Nine-Tailed Girl: “Musashi has stepped on one side of the scales weighing who will rule the Far East.”

On the sign frame screen, Yoshiaki opened a new sign frame so that Masamune could see.

She seemed to be intercepting the discussion between Musashi and Hashiba while also tracking those dragons.

And if she was letting Masamune see that...

...Is she telling me to do the same?

It was hard to tell whether this aunt was kind or strict, but Masamune sent Katakura instructions to take care of the interception and tracking.

One-Eyed Dragon: “No nation or species can just watch to see whether or not this Warring States era will change.”

Now.

One-Eyed Dragon: “How will Hashiba prevent Musashi from intervening? I think this is going to be quite interesting.”

On the Musashi, Masazumi looked at a large sign frame from atop the bridge in front of the academy.

A staticky figure was displayed there.

It was Hashiba.

She was in a mountainous region somewhere. She seemed to be on an iron-clad ship’s deck with mountains and the night sky in the background. She wore an M.H.R.R. summer uniform with long sleeves, a stole, and a monkey mask hat. She looked to the right, gestured some kind of instruction, pointed at herself, and nodded.

Worshiper: “Are they still preparing?”

Then Hashiba held up a microphone.

“Ah.”

She looked left and quickly lowered her head. Then...

“———”

Some feedback rang loud, so she quickly looked left and adjusted some settings on the microphone as she was told.

“Ah...ah.”

Then she finally looked into the camera. A panel that seemed to have something written on her side briefly entered the screen, and once it was gone...

“Um, Musashi.”

Masazumi realized the idiot was standing in front of her. He held his hand to his ear while turning that ear toward Hashiba’s sign frame.

“...?”

“Eh? Oh, can you not hear me? PR team! Their sound!”

But the idiot tilted his entire body in an obvious way and raised his arms in some kind of gesture.

Flat Vassal: “A plug...? Oh, no, he means the volume. Raise the volume, maybe?”

Seeing the idiot’s movements, Hashiba fiddled with her mic.

He then made a hurried “raise it, raise it” movements toward the right side of the screen.

...Umm.

The bad feeling in Masazumi’s heart only continued to grow.

“Uh,” said Hashiba.

The idiot waved his arms at her in an exaggerated fashion. Then he beckoned her forward.

Hashiba responded by moving her face in close and holding her hand to her ear. Then the idiot...

“Good eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeevening!!!!”

A great blast of noise knocked Hashiba back and the sign frame turned blue.

The bottom right corner of the blue screen contained a white line drawing of a monkey polishing a gourd with the text “Please wait just a moment.”

And the idiot...

“Ha ha ha! She fell for it!”

Masazumi delivered a solid kick into his back.

A moment later, color returned to the screen. It was mostly black, but not just because it was night.

That was someone’s hair color. A black-haired boy in an M.H.R.R. summer uniform stood on the other side of the screen.

...Who is that?

Mitotsudaira saw a headphone-wearing boy with his hair worn back. Once he

pushed someone off frame, he noticed them and spoke to the crossdresser.

“H-how could you do that to Hashiba-sama!? Don’t you think it’s especially wrong of a shrine maiden to pull such a ridiculous prank!?”

The crossdresser looked back at Masazumi and pointed at himself.

“Shrine maiden?”

“Judge. I would assume so.”

“Of the Asama Shrine?”

“W-well, he would probably think so, yes.”

“I see, I see.” The crossdresser nodded twice and clasped his hands toward Asama. “Heyyy, Asamaaaa! Sorryyy!”

“I-I’m scolding you later! I’m so scolding you!”



Katagiri Katsumoto

It was a little worrying how Horizon began cracking her shoulders and fingers, but, well, that was the usual way of things.

But the boy on the screen shook his slender body and pointed their way.

“I am #10 of Hashiba’s Ten Spears! Katagiri Katsumoto! I will negotiate in Hashiba-sama’s stead to correct the current state of Musashi!”

Fukushima was taking a break on the Azuchi Castle’s bridge, but she spat out her tea.

...W-wait just a second!

Llaf: “Katagiri-dono! Katagiri-dono! I know thou are our negotiator, but this isn’t what we originally planned!”

☐☐☐^[4]: “N-not to worry! They did something awful to Hashiba-sama! I’ll win this!”

Kiyo-Massive: “Um, I’m not really sure what you mean, but is this my fault...?”

Fukushima wanted to say that she did not understand either, but...

...I mustn’t hurt Katagiri-dono’s pride.

Llaf: “Katagiri-dono? I thought Yoshiaki-dono and Yasuharu-dono were with thee.”

☐☐☐: “Th-those two are sisters and yet they were doing things like t-taking baths together and s-sleeping in the same bed! Th-that’s not right! I think it’s wrong!”

“That’s right! I think it’s wrong too! Yes, this is the first time I’ve found someone in P.A. Oda who actually understands what morals are! And he’s even a fan of Hashiba-sama! I want to be his friend!!”

“And now the tentacle is finally asking for some BL friendship.”

“Wh-what are you talking about? Body language to become friends? Th-that sounds so dirty! Fuwa-sama, you need to stop looking at me with such impure eyes!”

“Ha ha ha. Mori-kun, your heart is so pure.”

“...Can we focus on what matters here? Like Takigawa? The Shirasagi Castle was destroyed, if you’ll recall.”

“That won’t be enough to kill someone like her. And there’s no use worrying about the Shirasagi Castle. It isn’t in our jurisdiction.”

“That’s not what I meant, Fuwa. I mean emotionally.”

Swaying black hair entered the dining hall. With a smile, its owner made an announcement.

“Listen up, everyone! Since I’ve been stuck sitting around here for so long, I made some treats. If you want some, we can have a secret party.”

“Hell yes! So she’s treating the underclassmen to some food! I’m not about to miss this!”

“Na-chan, you can take things way too seriously sometimes.”

“More importantly, isn’t anyone going to watch my future friend’s negotiation!?”

Katagiri saw Hashiba’s head wobbling as she stood by the filming staff.

How awful, he thought.

...What’s so fun about teasing someone as pure as Hashiba-sama!?

He pointed at the shrine maiden standing in the *lernen figur*.

“Excuse me, unforgivably mean shrine maiden!”

Flat Vassal: “He felt the need to say ‘excuse me’?”

Hori-ko: “He seems like the type who would become our victim quite often.”

Gold Mar: “Yeah, that’s the feeling I’m getting.”

Asama: “I’m erasing this part from the records later, okay? And Toori-kun? I’m seriously scolding you afterwards, so prepare yourself.”

“Hey,” Masazumi called over to Aoi while aware she was glaring at him. She kept her voice too low for Katagiri to hear.

“He plans on doing this with you.”

“Eh!? What!? Seijun!”

The idiot looked back and put his hand on his cheek in what he clearly thought was a cute pose. Then he pointed at Katagiri while wiggling his hips.

“That skinny P.A. Oda boy, who looks like he’d get abducted after taking only 7 steps in Osaka at night, wants to do it with me~!?”

The idiot approached the PR Committee’s camera and pushed up on his dummy boobs.

“Hee hee. What exactly do you want to do with me? You can’t touch, but do you want to?”

Masazumi was calm enough to only think, *Those breasts are really well made.* But on the sign frame, Katagiri blushed and raised his voice.

“This is impure!”

Obscene: “Yes, it is! Impurity is wrong! We must all live a proper youth!”

Sticky King: “Indeed. At the very least, acting irresponsibly will lead to unfortunate results!”

Uqui: “Impure... I see. Sometimes it feels like I’m learning new words every day...”

Unturning: “Why does this holy man always say things that are so hard to comment on...?”

But Katagiri remained unfazed even as the idiot grabbed the camera and had it pan lasciviously down from his wiggling breasts to his crotch. He pointed straight out at the idiot.

“Musashi’s public morals are in complete disorder! Who is your Public Morals Committee member!?”

Asama hung her head and raised her right forearm. And...

CAN: “This is Kanou, head of the Public Morals Committee. I completely understand the protest from P.A. Oda. Shall I enact Ookubo-sama’s previously proposed policy of death to molesters?”

Nagaya-Stable: “That would help clean up Musashi.”

It would clean it up too much, thought Masazumi.

“You have grown negligent in enforcing public morals!” accused Katagiri.

“Yes, yes, I’m sorry,” muttered Asama as she kept her head lowered and blankly apologized into empty space.

“This is why Musashi’s actions have strayed from the academy rules!” insisted Katagiri.

The crossdresser looked back when he heard that.

“Really?”

“Hmm, we might be in a bit of trouble.”

“Is there anything we can do?”

“We’ve been doing a lot lately to that end.”

“I see.” The idiot removed his breasts from the camera and winked at Katagiri.
“Could you explain what you mean?”

Katagiri reassessed his opinion of the shrine maiden.

“I thought you were just a lewd Asama Shrine shrine maiden, but it would seem you can be reasoned with!”

“Hee hee. Well, talk is important.”

“That’s right!” shouted a girl beyond the shrine maiden. He was fairly certain that was the Musashi Chancellor’s older sister who was always dancing while half-naked.

Musashi’s public morals really are messed up, he concluded with a sigh.

He had honestly started these negotiations in the heat of the moment, but he

had no real qualifications. Position-wise, he was simply “a member of Hashiba”.

...I’m glad I didn’t have to negotiate with their Vice President!

She is truly awe-inspiring, he thought even as an enemy. On the other hand, while he did not recognize this shrine maiden, she would be a normal student. Even if he did screw up the negotiation, he could pass it off as a discussion between students.

So he calmed himself and spoke.

“Musashi has strayed far from its duties as an academy!”

He raised 3 fingers.

“First of all, you have spent far too long in battle for a mere academy! And not passive battles! You have been actively starting them! That makes you a military attack base, not an academy!”

Smoking Girl: “It’s not like we can help it. That’s just what happens when we let Masazumi negotiate too much...”

Righteousness: “Yeah... I’m starting to feel like I have to agree with that.”

83: “Curry is best when you are feeling down.”

Vice President: “Well, excuse me! And they technically *have* been passive battles!!”

“Second,” said Katagiri while raising his eyebrows. This one actually applied to Hashiba as well. “To take power from the Testament Union, the Far East has implicitly encouraged and warmly welcomed female name inheritors, but what is with Musashi!? What are the guys doing letting all the girls take the lead!?”

The shrine maiden pressed her breasts against the *lernen figur*, but Katagiri only frowned and ignored it.

“And you girls should show more modesty!!”

The divine transmissions were going nuts in P.A. Oda.

Kiyo-Massive: “U-um, Katagiri-kun, you’re the only guy in the Ten Spears, so what are you really trying to say here...?”

□□凸: “I can accept putting on makeup when I’m around, but please stop changing in front of me and even asking me to help you because you can’t fit in your clothes! I am a boy! You need to show more shame!”

Llaf: “Oh, um, Katagiri-dono, thou are an excellent sewer and thou always notice the little things. Oh, but I do not ask thee to help me change very often...”

Kiyo-Massive: “S-sorry, that one’s me. When my new clothes come in, the fabric tends to be stiff... But the real problem is that there are parts that need to be held in place at the same time. I’ll admit my detachable armor is a special case, though.”

Black Wolf: “Kiyomasa, you need to realize this is a size issue... You too, Nagayasu.”

Kiyo-Massive: “W-well, I do get my measurements taken before ordering, but my chest and butt size tend to change in the time it takes to complete...”

□□凸: “How many times do I have to tell you to stop talking about that kind of thing when I’m around...?”

Kuro-Take: “May I interject? Um, Katagiri-kun? That whole thing about the Testament Union and female name inheritors? That’s supposed to remain unsaid. And we’re the Testament Union right now.”

□□凸: “Uuh. I-I’m sorry...”

Not good, not good, thought Katagiri as he shook his head.

He looked ahead. It was still not time to lower his fingers. So...

“Third.”

This was the main point.

“Musashi has not fully completed the school events needed before summer

break!”

Masazumi listened to the greatest weapon of Katagiri’s criticisms.

“Listen! As stated in the academy rules, the academies are meant to teach and guide the people of the Far East. They are schools! So why are you spending all your time waging war without completing your schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and festivals!? That is your duty as students! You are to complete those things before spending any time on politics or war! Am I wrong, shrine maiden?”

The shrine maiden looked back toward Masazumi.

“Is that a sound argument?”

“It’s unbelievably sound.”

And hopelessly straightforward, she thought.

But on the sign frame, Katagiri lowered his fingers and pointed at them instead.

“It is currently late July. Before making any active international political or military actions, Musashi must complete all of its official events without delay! And of course, if you take care of those now...”

He said it.

“Summer break will arrive right around the time you finish. ...And during the official event of summer break, students cannot participate in any active international political or military actions!”

Vice President: “Normally thinking, that means we can’t do anything for the month and a bit between now and the end of summer break at the start of September.”

Marube-ya: “Eh? What about Hashiba!?”

Vice President: “Their attack on Mouri is a history recreation, so it takes precedence over the academy rules. That means they can complete that without anyone getting in their way. And during the break, they can complete

Nobunaga's assassination without interference by settling it all as an internal matter. Then they can spend the month of the break building up the military might needed to take us on."

Mal-Ga: "It's all over then... We can't reach Hashiba or Nobunaga..."

Almost Everyone: "That was fast!!"

But at this rate, that's how it'll turn out, thought Masazumi as Katagiri began speaking again.

"If you forget all about schoolwork, you cannot call yourselves students! Musashi must return to its duties as students and regain a proper student life! We can speak after that, during summer break!"

He sure is fired up, thought Masazumi just before she heard the wind blowing overhead. Then "Musashi's" voice echoed through the air.

"Everyone, a dragon is approaching from overhead. It is giving an ID signal. It belongs to..."

...A dragon with an ID signal...?

That's rare, thought Masazumi as the answer was given.

"Sanada Academy! The dragon belongs to Chancellor Sanada Nobuyuki-sama! Over."

Immediately afterwards, someone jumped down from the wind overhead.

The Tachibana Couple and Futayo stepped forward to face someone of medium build.

"Excuse me! I am Sanada Academy Chancellor Sanada Nobuyuki!"

The leader of Sanada inhaled and stared sharply at them.

"I'm sorryyyyy! I'm weak, so please let me be friends with Musashiiii!"

Afterword

That was Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon 5-A.

The clash between Hashiba and Musashi is beginning and the other nations are beginning to move and deciding on a stance, so the entire world is growing connected and exciting.

I touched on it in the story, but even if a “nation” is a vague thing, you can think of it as having a “personality” created by the climate, culture, civilization, history, and type of people who live there.

Well, I guess I’m saying you can make anthropomorphized versions of nations and the world moves when those anthropomorphized Nation Girls and Nation Boys fistfight, bargain, join shoulders, and apply joint locks on each other.

But in that case, what happens to the characters within the anthropomorphized nations? I suppose they can’t do things how they want and get caught in the flow of the world, but then they find they like how Nation Boy is doing things and get an upper cut in.

I think the discussions about nations began at around this time because the people were trying to grasp at “something” that they should have been moving but was actually moving them. Or maybe they were intentionally trying to create it and control it. Oh, I’m getting pretty serious this time. This’ll be on the test.

Now for the chat.

“Got any painful stories from your school days?”

“When we were having a graded match in judo class, the opponents were decided by your seat number. I ended up against a complete literary type and I had been preparing since the night before. So as soon as the match began, I went in for a quick win.”

“I hope this isn’t a clichéd story where he ends up beating you up.”

“No, I stepped on the artificial tatami mat, got my foot caught, heard an awful sound, and broke my ankle. As I writhed around in pain, the literary guy expressionlessly raised his right hand and actually said, ‘I have no regrets for the life I've lived.’ ”

“Yeah, there was a really pathetic Kenshirou at his feet too.”

Is it just me or do I reference Fist of the North Star an awful lot?

The background music this time was Saitou Kazuyoshi’s Doko e Ikou. I listened to it for the atmosphere a lot when writing the Sanada group.

Anyway, this time the question was, “Who was trying to hide the most?”

Part B will be out the month after next. The Ten Spears are showing up and things are looking troublesome for Musashi, but please wait a while longer.

May 2012. A nice and rainy morning.

-Kawakami Minoru

Notes

1. ↑ The way she writes Event Stop can also be interpreted as Sumo Referee's Sperm
2. ↑ Anagni sounds like the Japanese term for anal masturbation.
3. ↑ Apple pie sounds kind of like "jiggling boobs" in Japanese.
4. ↑ The Katsu of Katsumoto can be seen as these three kanji stacked vertically.